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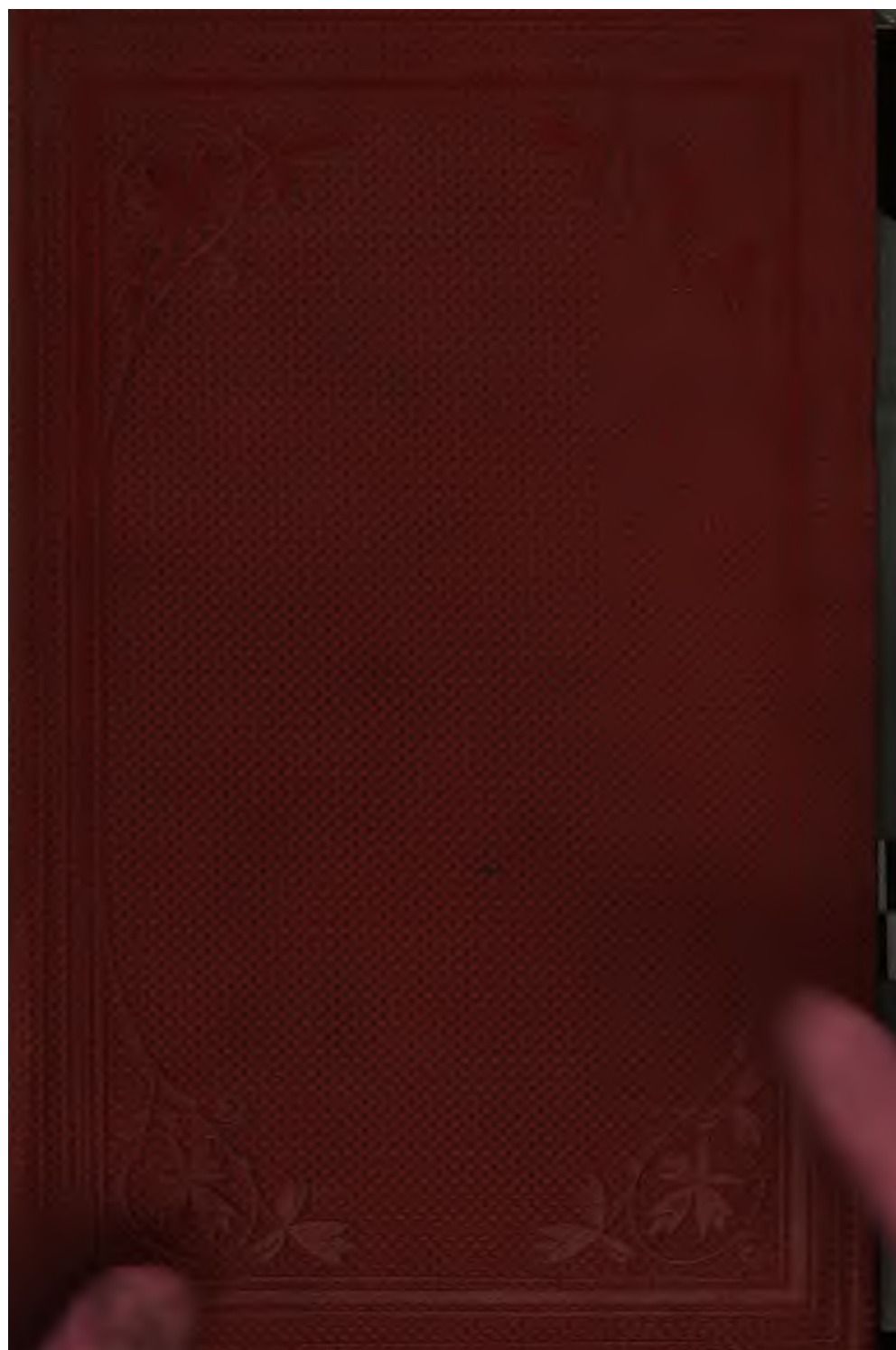
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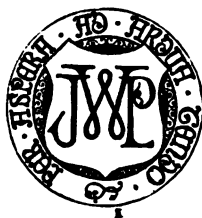
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HANWORTH.

H A N W O R T H.

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN

FRASER'S MAGAZINE.

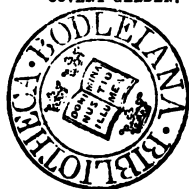


LONDON:
JOHN W. PARKER AND SON, WEST STRAND.

1858.

The Author reserves the right of Translation.

LONDON:
SAVILL AND EDWARDS, PRINTERS, CHANDOS STREET,
COVENT GARDEN.



H A N W O R T H.

CHAPTER I.

MRS. RAMSAY was the widow of a merchant and the mother of one grown-up daughter. She had been the mother of two, but of the eldest she was wont to say, being very much addicted to quotations, that she was ‘not lost but gone before.’ It would sometimes happen when she addressed this observation to a new acquaintance, that the intimation would be received with a proper sigh of sympathy and a condoling expression of countenance, and then Mrs. Ramsay would say, soothingly—‘Do not distress yourself, my dear madam; my eldest daughter is “gone before” only in the matrimonial sense, and I have quite got over it now, for it is four years ago that she married, and her husband, Sir Simon Howell, is really an excellent man, and Elderslie is a very fine place. To confess the truth, Sophia was so handsome and so accomplished that it was impossible to hope to keep her by my side for longer than one whole season, nor could I with any

conscience wish her to "blush unseen," or "waste her sweetness on the desert air;" and I assure you that I am indeed only very thankful that the difference of age between my children (there are five years between them) leaves me still one daughter.' On this explanation the acquaintance, annoyed at having been cheated into a misplaced sympathy, would, without any touch of sentiment, wish her the same good fortune with the youngest, and then leave the mother to finish her rising sigh alone.

Mrs. Ramsay admired and esteemed her eldest daughter, Lady Howell. She admired the attractions that had induced Sir Simon to offer her his hand, his title, and his estate, and she esteemed the good sense that had induced Sophia to accept them. It was true that Sophia's pretensions were not small, for she had the two gifts most likely to ensure a lasting affection, beauty and fortune, and she added to these a good deal of accomplishment, that is to say, she sang extremely well, and could play her own accompaniments efficiently; but still a baronet with £10,000 a-year and a fine seat in the country was an undeniably good alliance for the daughter of a merchant's widow, who herself was, as her friends observed at the wedding breakfast, 'nobody,' and never had been 'anybody;' or was even 'worse than nobody,' for it had been once whispered that the rich merchant had taken his beautiful wife off the boards in some remote provincial town, a rumour to

which Mrs. Ramsay's trick of quotations, mostly Shakspearian, gave an air of considerable probability. It was no doubt a day of severe trial to Mrs. Ramsay's cotemporaries and early friends when the wedding cards were received: but consolation, when duly sought for, is always to be obtained, and when the distressed mothers met together in council, they silenced the uncomfortable sensations of envy by passing a decree that Sir Simon Howell was a fool.

What the council declared, however, and what decree they passed, made no difference in the prospects of the married pair, for the days of fairies are gone by, and though there is no want of malevolent hags, their maledictions have ceased to take effect; and so it happened that, in spite of shaking of heads and gloomy prophecies, Lady Howell's children were born with as much sense as other people's, and with more than the common share of beauty. With her handsome children, her fine house in town, and her large parties, she soon became an object of admiration; and by the time her eldest boy was five years old, she was generally forgiven for the fault of having made a good marriage. But Mrs. Ramsay was still a favourite mark for ridicule, which she drew upon herself by her indiscreet pretensions. Now that her beauty was gone, or only existed in her daughters, she felt it necessary to give up the airs of coquetry, but then she assumed instead the airs of literature

and sentiment, and it was to support these that she talked, as some authors write, in inverted commas.

Mrs. Ramsay had virtues, a graceful exterior, an amiable temper, and plenty of money; but they were marred by a vice that is with difficulty forgiven, the vice of affectation, and society revenged itself by suggesting that the effect of her second daughter Margaret's classical beauty was damaged by an air of pride; that she was twenty-two already; that four seasons had passed; that she was too hasty since her coming out in rejecting offers, and that she might live to repent it. Margaret, it was true, had rejected some offers that might be called advantageous ones, but she had too much understanding and too much heart to make such a marriage as her sister had done, and the only fault that she deserved to be charged with was a certain air of contempt with which it was her custom to reply to these unwelcome suits. At the time, however, that this narrative begins, a report was circulating to which the first impulse was given by Mrs. Ramsay, that Margaret was the object of an admiration that was not unwelcome, and that Lord Hanworth, a man remarkable for his acquirements and for his fine character, and with whose tastes her own peculiarly sympathized, was her suitor.

Mrs. Ramsay was willing to promote her daughter's happiness, so she gave dinners to which Han-

worth was invited, and she gave a ball. This ball had now just taken place, and it had been successful ; the house was restored to its accustomed order, and the drawing-room showed no sign of disturbance, but Mrs. Ramsay was still tired, and Margaret, and Margaret's friend, Edith Somers, who was their guest, were still both very tired ; indeed, so much so that while they all three sat together, half an hour had passed without their exchanging one word. The silence was at length broken by Edith commenting upon it.

‘How silent we have been,’ said she ; ‘I am sure no three men would have remained so long together without a word ; but then no three men could ever be so completely exhausted, or have such important things to think about. Mrs. Ramsay, I have been pondering seriously over it all this time, and I have come to the conclusion that your ball was successful.’

‘Yes,’ replied Mrs. Ramsay, laying a book of poems that was open in her lap, down upon a small or-molu table near her, and yawning. ‘“We have been met in the day of success :” when I looked in upon the dancers, really there were so many, that once or twice it seemed to me that they could hardly find room to turn round, and I myself could scarcely see or speak for the crowd ; and then it was not a vulgar crowd—not a mere squeeze. No ; some of our guests were distinguished ; such as might well “sit upon a hill apart.”’

‘To sit anywhere apart was difficult last night,’ said Edith.

‘You should not say so, my dear,’ said Mrs. Ramsay, ‘for I certainly saw *you* apart in my own little room, with our poet Charlton: don’t you remember? and I said,—Ah, there you are, Mr. Charlton, “sporting with Amaryllis in the shade.” But I was not allowed to hear his answer, for Mrs. Hamilton called me away to introduce her daughter to somebody. Poor thing! such a dear, nice girl, but unfortunate in her looks, and I had to make a strict search for a partner for her.’

‘Mr. Charlton would perhaps have observed to you,’ said Edith, ‘that we were not “in the shade,” for your room was brilliantly lighted; nor were we “apart,” for not far from us were sitting Margaret and Lord Hanworth.’

At these words Margaret looked up, and blushed, and Mrs. Ramsay smiled.

‘True,’ said she; ‘and, do you know, I could not help noticing that Lady Allerton, as she passed through the room, looked so vexed. “The still-vexed Bermoothes:”—she has certainly thought of Lord Hanworth for her daughter Adeline. But what of that; “what’s Hecuba to me?” I have no wish to part with my daughter; indeed, I do not at all understand this kind of feeling.’

‘Why should you?’ said Edith. ‘Let us talk of something else: it is to my thinking the worst part

of a ball, that it calls into play, or at least that it brings to the surface, so many mean jealousies.'

'As for that,' said Margaret, 'mean and jealous people will be jealous and mean everywhere.'

At this moment a knock at the door caused Margaret to start and colour with some secret expectation, and Mrs. Ramsay to rise from the sofa to adjust the ribbons of her cap. She had just resumed a becoming attitude, when Lady Allerton was announced. Mrs. Ramsay and Margaret were both disappointed, and by their languor of manner they both betrayed their feelings, so that it became incumbent upon Edith to support the bulk of the conversation, and to answer Lady Allerton's many inquiries with a sufficiently lively air; but this was not enough to satisfy Lady Allerton; it was not the amount of attention that she required, and she soon remarked that Mrs. Ramsay appeared fatigued almost to the point of exhaustion; 'but then no wonder,' she added, 'for it is a very fatiguing thing to give a ball: it is not only the standing about and receiving one's friends, but it is the anxiety of mind, the misgivings that will occur, and the little disappointments that must be encountered. I mean when it is not an every-day affair, a mere matter of routine.'

Upon this hint, Mrs. Ramsay began to rally and to recover an appearance of vivacity. But Lady Allerton did not intend to stay; she was sure that Mrs. Ramsay ought not to talk, that she ought to lie

down to rest: she should not, in fact, have come in at all, but that she had received and accepted an invitation to Elderslie for the following Friday, and she was anxious to know whether Mrs. Ramsay and Margaret were to be there.

‘Yes,’ said Margaret, ‘and Edith Somers.’

Lady Allerton was very glad; Lady Allerton was not aware that Miss Somers and Lady Howell were acquainted.

‘All my friends are Edith’s,’ said Margaret in reply.

Lady Allerton observed that this was quite a romantic friendship, and took her leave.

CHAPTER II.

ELDERSLIE HALL, the seat of Sir Simon Howell, was very near being one of the show-places of the county which was honoured by its existence in it. Fortunately, however, for its inhabitants and their visitors, it had escaped this inconvenient distinction. Ladies were not chased from room to room of a morning, in order that their abandoned work and their books hastily laid down might be subjected to the scrutinizing examination of strangers, whose curiosity is often more alive to the tastes and occupations of the owners of the mansions to which they have obtained entrance, than to the wonders of art or of upholstery which give the only fair excuse for their admittance. Yet Elderslie might easily have taken its place among the houses recommended to the attention of visitors in the 'Handbook' of —shire. A very little more architectural merit, a very few more pictures and statues, and a very little more historical interest, would have made it equal with many houses through whose rooms admiring parties are now hurried by magnificent housekeepers.

The house was a large one, and had about it all

the appurtenances of terraces, flights of steps, formal gardens, and picturesque outbuildings, which serve so well to connect art and nature. Ornate but less artificial pleasure-grounds lay beyond the clipped hedges and trim parterres in one direction; and beyond these again were shrubberies merging insensibly into the natural woods, and clothing the sides of the amphitheatric semicircle of hill which lay behind the house, and through which walks were cut at various levels, and in different directions. On the other side was a spacious walled garden, with a mulberry tree in the centre; while a sun-dial and a small fish-pond balanced each other at opposite corners. The walls and beds bore testimony to the diligence and skill of the gardener out of doors; while a row of forcing-houses and a grapery showed that all the modern science of horticulture had been added to all the old-fashioned excellences of former days. In winter winds or in summer heats, the walls gave protection alike from sun or blast; and a few roses and other simple flowers were ranged along the paths, so that the eye was at once gratified by their beauty, and satisfied by the sight of the goodly rows of edibles which occupied the chief portion of the ground.

The interior of the house was comfortable and roomy, without exceeding the limits of domesticity. The principal feature was a library, or long gallery for books, which ranged the whole length of one side

of the house. Over the main chimney-piece of this room hung a portrait, to which the attention of strangers was sure to be directed by Sir Simon before they had been long his guests. It was a good full-length picture of a placid-looking gentleman in a flowing-wig and a damask silk gown, covered profusely with golden flowers, standing at a table, and apparently absorbed in reading the address of a letter which he held in one hand, and which was superscribed to

‘The Right Honourable

Sir SIMON HOWELL,

Chancellor of the Exchequer.’

This Sir Simon was in fact an ancestor of the present Baronet, in the third or fourth generation back, who had been member for the county, and who for a short time had held the office in the robes of which he was depicted. His name is of course duly recorded in Beatson’s *Index*, but it made little noise in history, and beyond the walls of Elderslie is now seldom seen, and never heard of. Upon his descendant, however, the sometime minister continued to exercise a curious influence. The fact that one of his family had once been a statesman in office, however obscure, and had sat in Parliament for his native county, was never absent from Sir Simon’s thoughts. He had been in Parliament himself for a short time, but under circumstances to which he was not very

fond of alluding. A vacancy had occurred in the representation of a neighbouring borough a few months only before the expected termination of a Parliament. The noble lord who was almost omnipotent in the disposition of the seat, and who was anxious for once that it should not be held either by a member of his own family, or some elsewhere seatless member of the Government which he supported, had thought it a favourable opportunity to admit the voters to some apparent exercise of their choice, by permitting Sir Simon to be elected. Sir Simon was eminently respectable, not unpopular with his neighbours, and entirely unconnected with himself; and the omission for once to nominate in the usual way might perhaps help to save the borough from inscription in the Schedule A or Schedule B of a future Reform Bill.

So far the noble lord's motives were intelligible. It was more surprising to his friends in what manner Sir Simon was induced to forego his dignity, and to allow himself to be returned for what was obviously a temporary purpose; in short, to allow himself to be used in the character of that somewhat old-fashioned domestic utensil, called a warming-pan. If all that passed between the noble lord or his active agent, Mr. Burgage, and Sir Simon could have been brought to light without still farther offence to Sir Simon's wounded dignity, the process would have been understood. In truth, as may be surmised,

more was said than was meant, or Sir Simon chose to think so. Sir Simon never forgot the great article of his family creed, that Elderslie should be represented in the House of Commons, and indeed almost believed that the British Constitution would be in danger if he were not in Parliament as head of the house of Elderslie and lineal descendant of his obscurely great namesake. Sir Simon, in short, was dying for a seat. Why he did not sit for the county as a matter of course, was a question he never could satisfactorily answer to himself; but although one or two general elections and one or two death vacancies had occurred since he was of age, he had never come forward. He would not confess it to himself, but he was not at heart sure that the leading men in the county thought it so necessary for themselves as he did, that he, Sir Simon, should be one of the knights of the shire. So he never broke ground on the subject with any of the great magnates, or any of the subordinate but not less powerful managers of such things, upon whose wishes or interests the much coveted honour of parading the county town on the day of election, with a sword girt round his body, depended.

Yet whenever an election was impending, Sir Simon's hopes were high within him. He opened his letters with a peculiar interest; he glanced anxiously at the column headed 'Electioneering News' in the local newspapers; he even expected

that every carriage that rolled up the avenue might contain a deputation, or a confidential mission, to request him on the part of the influentials of the county to suffer himself to be put in nomination, with every promise of support from the proper quarters. The Baronet's letters, however, on such occasions were as dull as usual; the newspapers obstinately refused even to give currency to a rumour, afterwards to be contradicted, 'That it was with much pleasure they had to announce that a well-known gentleman, the owner of Elderslie Hall, one of whose ancestors had formerly served the country in high office, had been requested to stand for the county;' and the vehicles approaching the house, only contained the doctor from the neighbouring town come to see one of the servants; or his own lawyer, who did no business in Mr. Burgage's line, bringing him ordinary papers to sign.

So that when the specious offer to occupy the vacant seat for Calverwells was artfully presented to Sir Simon, it found him ready to swallow the bait, and eager to enter Parliament even as a borough member; viewing in his own mind the deferred honours of the county representative as the reward of the parliamentary experience and distinction to be gained in his humbler and preliminary capacity while sitting for Calverwells. The offer was of course accompanied by many expressions of esteem, and of regret that his services had been so long

withheld from the country. Sir Simon would have told any one at the time that his tenure of the seat was to be permanent; Mr. Burgage, on the contrary, would both then and ever afterwards have taken his oath that it was distinctly intimated to Sir Simon—or at least must have been understood between men of the world—that Sir Simon must have known—that the seat was not to be his a second time. And if he were speaking to a friend of Sir Simon's, he would of course throw in, that Sir Simon was really looking to the permanent representation of the county—a piece of vanity, indeed, which Sir Simon had allowed to escape him in his communications with Mr. Burgage, and the recollection of which effectually closed Sir Simon's lips when, after the next general election, he found himself neither member for Calverwells, nor for the county, nor for any other place, and read the addresses on his letters, shorn of the magic capitals M.P., which for the time he regarded with more love than even the enduring capital B and small t, of which nothing could deprive him.

To return to the library at Elderslie. Its walls were occupied by twelve wire-grated bookcases, each surmounted by the bust of a Cæsar, and containing a somewhat ancient collection of books. Indeed, they had for the most part been acquired by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whose portrait was appropriately placed among the volumes which he

had brought together, and some of the least important of which were even dedicated to himself. For in his younger days he had lived with the wits of the Augustan age of the last century—had frequented Will's, and mingled an affectation of literature with his politics. Accordingly, the shelves bore an original copy of the *Spectator*, bound up as it came out, and with all the old advertisements of the day on the outside sheets. Upon them, too, were the folio subscription copies of Mr. Pope's works, and many a row of forgotten pamphlets on the theological and political questions of the time.

A small room between the library and the entrance-hall, now used as a gun-room and depository for the overflowings of the library, had some historical interest attached to it. In it, according to the traditions of the house, two of the conspirators in the Gunpowder-plot used to hold their meetings during the early progress of that scheme. The fact is not recorded in general history, nor in any of the particular memoirs on the subject; but in all probability the tradition was correct—and that antiquary would have fared ill at Elderslie who ventured to doubt its truth in the hearing of Sir Simon, for he valued the legend of this apartment only next after the family portrait in the library, and he seldom passed through it in company without a solemn joke about smelling powder, and an allusion to the present use of the chamber.

The rest of the house may be easily imagined. There were some fair Italian pictures of the later masters, and a few antique statues of moderate merit, brought home about the middle of the last century by the then head of the family, who made the grand tour, as became a gentleman of the period; and when such commodities were to be had at a less price, and perhaps with less chance of imposture than has been the case more lately.

Lady Howell's rooms were cheerful and pleasant, and the house generally, apart from a certain air of pomposity, was habitable, and full of resources for a rainy day.

CHAPTER III.

IT was, however, on no rainy day, but on a fine one in July, only two days following that on which she was introduced to the notice of the reader, in London, that Mrs. Ramsay, accompanied by her daughter and Edith, and occupying Sir Simon's barouche, sent to meet them at the station at Calverwells, drove up to the porch of Elderslie Hall. Mrs. Ramsay got out with glittering eyes and a smiling face, but Edith observed that Margaret looked pale and weary, and that she had an air of languor while she followed the pompous train of servants who went to announce her arrival to Lady Howell. As she entered the drawing-room looking out upon the terrace, bright with flowers and fountains, Lady Howell came forward to meet her, and kissed her with a kiss that was rather patronizing than affectionate. She received her mother and Edith with great courtesy, but with little warmth, and Edith felt a chill creep over her. Whatever the influence of Lady Howell's manner upon Edith and Margaret, it produced no effect upon Mrs. Ramsay, whose loquacity was unabated, and whose spirits

seemed to rise as the grandeur of Elderslie Hall struck her more and more in every part.

‘I never,’ she said, ‘approach this enchanting place without thinking of that sublime passage in *Macbeth*, “This castle hath a pleasant seat.”’

‘Ah!’ said Lady Howell, with a laugh, which she often used, because her teeth were handsome; ‘I see you are not changed. The smoke of London has not smothered your poetical fire. But it is really a pity to waste these fine things on us. They should be printed and published, as Selections from the first English writer, or Flowers culled from choice garlands, or Parterres from a poet’s terrace, collected by a lady of fashion; and then you might dedicate the volume to William Charlton, the greatest poet of his time. That sounds very like a real book, does it not? What do you think of it? What do you say, Edith; and you, Margaret, who are both such true admirers of this modern poet? Will you consult Charlton himself about it? You can, for we expect him to dinner to-night.’

‘Charlton to dinner to-night!’ cried Edith; and all the chillness evaporated. ‘To dinner to-night. How glad I am!’

‘How have you contrived to get him?’ questioned Mrs. Ramsay, who was much accustomed to think of contrivance in such matters.

‘How? Why, by asking him. He and his wife have taken a house at Calverwells, and there they

are established for the present. I have asked his wife as well ! That, indeed, is necessary ; for do you know, actually, he will not go out without her ? He is not so comfortable a poet as the late Tom Moore, who knew how to love his Bessie quietly at home, and to leave her there, when he was wanted out. No ; we must be willing to receive this poet as he is, with encumbrances.'

'You are mistaken,' said Edith. 'I am sure you do not know Mrs. Charlton, or you would not call her an encumbrance. She is graceful and gentle, and if she hangs upon him, it is as an ornament.'

'It is true,' said Lady Howell, 'that she is not actually vulgar. She is, I admit, quite presentable ; still she is the daughter of an obscure artist, and there is nothing very particular about her in any way. However, Sir Simon is willing to receive her.'

'I am glad of it,' said Mrs. Ramsay ; 'for after all, one should not separate man and wife. You know, my dear, you would not exactly like Sir Simon to be asked to leave you at home, now would you ? "Home, home, sweet, sweet home,"' and she began to hum the air.

'You are out of tune, mamma,' said Lady Howell, sharply.

'"Like sweet bells jangled,"' rejoined Mrs. Ramsay.

'Will you show us our rooms, Sophia?' said

Margaret, wishing to interrupt a dialogue which she did not relish.

‘Certainly,’ said Lady Howell; ‘it is right that you should refresh your looks a little before you see Sir Simon;’ and as she spoke she preceded them upstairs, and then ushered them into a handsome bedroom which, by their own particular request, they were to share.

A classical vase filled with roses occupied the centre of a writing-table of inlaid marble, and

‘Oh! what beautiful roses,’ cried Edith; ‘I must put some of them in my hair.’

‘Put some of them into Margaret’s cheeks,’ said Lady Howell, ‘and I will thank you;—why the child has lost her complexion, and her beauty a good deal depends on it. Adieu for the present, my dears; in ten minutes Sparkles shall come to you (for mamma must have her own maid entirely to herself), and mind that you let her turn you out according to her own taste—it is better than yours, I assure you.’

With this she left the room; and as she went out Edith could not refuse her admiration to her tall figure and to the fine shape of her head, but, turning to compare her beauty with that of her more delicate and refined sister, she perceived that Margaret was sunk in thought, and completely abstracted from the scene before her. Knowing that silent thought may sometimes afford much pleasure, she would not at

once interrupt her, but occupied herself quietly with arranging some of the flowers for her hair. At the end of five minutes, however, she thought it time that a day-dream should cease, and she addressed her friend—

‘Margaret, did you hear what Lady Howell said, and are you personally acquainted with Sparkles, upon whom we are to place so much dependence, to whose better judgment we are blindly to resign our own on one of the most important of our pursuits in life; and can you tell me if she deserves such implicit confidence?’

Margaret started at the first sound of Edith’s voice, but at the end of the sentence it was clear that she had listened, for she said, ‘Of course a lady’s-maid in the establishment of Sir Simon must have a taste beyond our own.’

‘And yet,’ rejoined Edith, ‘as Sir Simon’s visitors we must gain an importance.’

‘Yes, but we are only just arrived, and the maid has been here three years. Oh, Edith, I wish I could like my brother-in-law better. I think I ought, for he is really a well-conducted man; but I do feel sorry to see his eldest boy look like him. His solemn sententiousness, his narrow-minded self-sufficiency, his puffed-up pride all about nothing—for he has nothing to be proud of—I feel to be almost unendurable. In order to bear his society I am obliged to think of something better, and then I contrast

with all this assumption the quiet ease of Lord Hanworth's manner.'

'Have you been thinking of that all this time?' asked Edith, with a smile.

'Oh no, not of that; I was thinking about Charlton's last poem.'

'And about Lord Hanworth's criticism on it, at his last visit in Chesterfield-street. Well, you know I ventured to differ from him.'

'You did, Edith, and I envied your unconstraint, your freedom of speech, and your fearlessness, when I could hardly speak, even to say Yes.'

'Do not distress yourself for that, Margaret; you were probably well enough understood; and as for what I said, you know Lord Hanworth must sometimes be opposed like other men, or his temper will be ruined: so even for your sake I am resolved not to be afraid of him.'

'Ah! not for my sake, Edith, but for the sake of following your own nature: you are able to indulge your humour, having no strong feeling to depress it. It is easy to be valiant when, if you should chance to offend, you may do it without concern.'

'No, no, Margaret; indeed I could not offend any human being without some sensation of concern—not even Sir Simon; but a difference with me could not offend Lord Hanworth, and indeed I believe I am so fortunate as not to have the power of offending anybody.'

This sentence was closed with something like a sigh, which did not escape Margaret, and she rose and kissed her cheek, and would have said something gentle to her but that the lady's-maid's knock was heard at the door and she was admitted, and then the earnest business of the toilet began. It was so well accomplished that Sir Simon, when these young girls entered his drawing-room, was satisfied that their presence was ornamental, and accordingly he advanced to meet them with his best grace, which was bad enough—a frigid extension of one finger to Edith, a condescending bestowal of the whole hand upon Margaret, a ceremonious bow to his mother-in-law. But that lady was determined to force a better reception. In good humour with herself, and with her new dress, it was natural that she should be in good humour with Sir Simon too—and besides, she was romantic and affectionate; so she stepped daintily forward on her little feet, and placing two well-ringed hands on his broad high shoulders, she said, caressingly, ‘Sir Simon, my dear son, it does me good to see you. You and Sophia are looking well, as always; tell me, what do you think of us?’

‘I think you will look better when you have been a few days at Elderslie,’ said Sir Simon, with an attempt at graciousness; ‘but allow me now to place you in an arm-chair, and suffer me to place you so that you will have in view all the beauties of our terrace. Is there any one present to whom I should introduce

you first? No, I believe you already are acquainted with General Sir George Allerton and Lady Allerton, their daughter Adeline, and Mr. and Mrs. Lacy, and Captain French, and probably Sophia has already informed you that they are doing us the honour of being our guests.'

'She has told me,' replied Mrs. Ramsay, 'that you are doing them the honour of receiving them.'

'Be that as it may,' said Sir Simon, 'it is certain that they are here. We shall be but a small party at dinner to-night, the only expected addition to it being the Charltons, who are coming over from Calverwells. Charlton, as you know, is a poet, and, I am free to admit, a notorious poet, whatever may be my private opinion of his merits; and Lady Howell has invited Mrs. Charlton too, for he will not go where she is not asked, and Lady Howell assures me that she is quite presentable. I have also heard Lord Hanworth speak favourably of her, and you know at any rate *we* can afford to be civil.'

'Certainly,' said Mrs. Ramsay, who always agreed with her son-in-law.

And now Sir Simon left her in order politely to sit down by Lady Allerton, who had that very morning written his name down at the head of a list of bores that she kept on her private tablets. Mrs. Lacy meanwhile was describing to Lady Howell all the particulars of the last railway accident. Mrs. Lacy was a lady whose tallness and paleness gave

her particular claims to the character of gentility, and whose disposition to moan and sigh gave her peculiar claims to the character of amiability. She was then a lady-like, amiable woman; though Lady Allerton, when she spoke to Lady Howell in confidence, called her a very tiresome one. When she greeted Margaret and Edith, she assured them that they looked very pale, and was certain that they had found the journey down very fatiguing; and when she had done that, she passed on to a lamentation over all the illnesses that the late heat had occasioned, with minute descriptions of a particular case of typhus, and general anticipations of a cholera likely to break out, dwelling upon the details of suffering with great zest.

Lady Allerton, observing the growing enthusiasm of her manner, inquired 'What disaster or what disease is Mrs. Lacy describing?'

'I have no doubt,' said Sir Simon, solemnly, 'that she is telling Margaret Ramsay of the late appearance of typhus in this neighbourhood. It has been severe—unaccountably severe; it has, indeed, attacked one of the children of one of *my* tenants. In fact its severity is quite unexampled.'

'I thought so,' said Lady Allerton. 'I saw that Mrs. Lacy had something that she enjoyed talking about. So it is that we suffer for each other's good. If there were no excessive miseries in the world, where would dear Mrs. Lacy find a vent for her

excessively compassionate disposition? It is a positive benefit to her that your tenant's child has the typhus.'

In answer to this observation, Sir Simon took out his watch, and when he had looked at it, he observed,

'It is seven o'clock, Lady Howell.'

Now, seven o'clock was the dinner hour at Elderslie Hall, and Sir Simon despised whoever forgot it; but the Charltons were not yet come.

'Will you ring for dinner, then?' replied Lady Howell, 'or will you wait five minutes?'

'They know the dinner hour,' said Sir Simon. 'I will ring.'

And the bell was rung, and the gong was sounded. Dinner was announced, and Sir Simon led in Lady Allerton, the rest following in due order; or, as Mrs. Ramsay observed, in the 'order of their going.' The ostentatious display of plate on the dinner-table failed to restore Sir Simon's ruffled good-humour, and the sight of the two gaps roused him to fresh peevishness. He swallowed his soup silently for a while, and then observed to Lady Allerton,

'Poets are peculiar people.'

Poets are peculiar people! So it seemed at that moment to Sir Simon; and the weaknesses of genius showed more clearly to his eyes on this than on all the many other occasions when they are recorded for the satisfaction of the less gifted. The vices of

Byron, the extravagances of Schiller, the intoxication of Burns, the life of Shelley, and the death of Chatterton, evinced it less strongly to him than the too late for dinner of Charlton. For Sir Simon had a near sight.

Lady Allerton, who readily took up any theme on which she could display her smartness, at once took up this, not wasting the pungency of her remarks on the dull ears of Sir Simon, but expressing them loudly for the benefit of the whole party.

‘Poets,’ said she, ‘are indeed peculiar people. Never punctual, they expect us all to be punctual for them; they indulge themselves in all their fancies, and indulge the world with all their complaints. They expect us all to give way to them, and the only thing they give way to is their own temper.’

‘But *I*,’ said Sir Simon, ‘never give way to anybody.’

‘Poets,’ said Mrs. Ramsay at this juncture, ‘are privileged people.’

‘I suppose on account of their rarity,’ said Edith.

‘After all, what is poetry?’ asked Lady Howell.

Sir Simon stroked his chin gently, winked his eyes, and leant back in his chair as he replied,

‘Poetry is great stuff.’

‘Bravo!’ cried Captain French, who was a young coxcomb in the Guards. ‘I should like you to sit as a member for my county, Sir Simon, to represent my sentiments in Parliament.’

‘ When I was a member of the House——’ rejoined Sir Simon.

At these words, spoken with particular deliberation, a gloom showed itself on every face, for there was no theme more tedious than that of Sir Simon’s proceedings as a member of Parliament.

‘ When I sat in the House I must inform you, Captain French, that I purposely avoided——’

But what he purposely avoided was never known, for happily a stir was heard in the hall, and the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. and Mrs. Charlton. Mrs. Charlton was attractive and graceful, and with a natural and gentle ease replied to Lady Howell’s haughty courtesies, and expressed her regret for the accident that had detained them on the road. Lady Howell in return begged her to excuse the seeming inattention of beginning dinner without them. Mrs. Charlton was delighted that they had not waited, and General Allerton, who was a gourmand, and next whom she was seated, was very honestly delighted too. Sir Simon, with a severe look at Charlton, said that it was his rule never to wait dinner for any one; but the look was lost upon Charlton, for he was occupied in disengaging his chair from Lady Allerton’s skirt. He was indeed somewhat slow in his movements, and in society generally was rather thoughtful than quick. His manner was even not wholly free from embarrassment, as if at times the fulness of his thought or

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of his feeling impeded the readiness of his utterance ; but his countenance was rapid in its changes, indicating a temperament at variance with his manner, and his bearing was peculiarly erect.

Lady Allerton, who had but a few minutes since commented so sharply upon him and his fraternity, was now seeking to add some of his distinction to her own by an appearance of familiarity, and was opening upon him the full fire of her flattery.

‘ You have just heard,’ said she, ‘ Sir Simon’s remark, that his rule is never to wait for dinner for any one ; even for *you* he would make no exception ; and to say the truth, the disappointment that came over us all, the fear lest we should altogether lose the rare treat of your presence that was promised to us, made our dinner especially necessary to us in this case. Our spirits, I assure you, were beginning to fail.’

To this direct volley Charlton could not oppose a steady front. He bowed his head and found no answer ready. All men like flattery, and all women, too ; but few like it so coarsely served. A delicate palate will only relish it delicately done ; and besides, there was something in Lady Allerton’s nature that was out of harmony with Charlton’s ; and therefore, with no more attention to her than bare politeness required, his eyes sought his two especial favourites, Edith and Margaret. Edith sat opposite to him, and a bright glance of recognition was ex-

changed between them,—such a glance as passes only between two friends.

‘You seem to know Miss Somers very well,’ said Lady Allerton, in sharp tones.

‘I do,’ replied Charlton; and his tone was earnest.

‘Have you known her long?’

‘No; but I know her well.’

‘Those are best known who have least in them,’ said Lady Allerton.

‘But that is not the case with Miss Somers.’

‘Perhaps,’ suggested Lady Allerton, ‘she is a friend of Mrs. Charlton?’

‘Mrs. Charlton feels as I do about her. Her sweet countenance, her lively and feminine wit, her charming enthusiasm——’

‘Ah!’ interrupted Lady Allerton, ‘there I have it; you have given me the key to unlock the secret of her attraction. That “charming enthusiasm” is for you; that accounts for it. She is not admired by men generally.’

‘She probably does not want the general admiration of men.’

‘She has no accomplishments; she may perhaps just draw and sing a little, but it is so very little that it can be used merely, as the phrase is, to please herself: it is nothing in society.’

‘But she can please without it.’

‘Of course; by her enthusiasm.’

Sir Simon caught the word, and it inspired him with a sentence. He cleared his throat, winked his eyes, and said—‘Enthusiasm is a very foolish thing.’

‘I quite agree with you,’ said Captain French; ‘enthusiasm *is* a very foolish thing.’

‘How very satirical you both are,’ said Mrs. Lacy; ‘I declare it is quite cruel.’

‘What a first-rate dish this is,’ cried General Allerton, who, now that the first longings of his appetite were assuaged, was able to speak. ‘It is glorious, it is delicious; it is admirably compounded! It combines all the merits of French and English cookery!’ He spoke thick and fast.

‘There,’ said Charlton to Lady Allerton, ‘is an instance of genuine enthusiasm. Sir Simon must proceed to condemn it.’

But Sir Simon approved it—steadily, strongly, and deliberately he approved it.

‘You are quite right; I do not know a better dish. Our cook is a first-rate hand—I do not know a better cook.’

Lady Howell, whose desire to respect her husband often led her to the rescue, to try to give a new turn to his observations, remarked—

‘What Sir Simon says is true; there is a remarkable improvement in English cookery. If the long peace with France has done nothing better, it has at least done that for us.’

'On the other hand,' said Charlton, 'they complain that theirs is damaged by contact with ours.'

'“When Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war,”' said Mrs. Ramsay.

'A Frenchman,' continued Charlton, 'was lamenting to me the other day the general degradation of genius in his country; and lifting up his hands and eyes, he said, “Monsieur, pour la cuisine, c'est une chose du passé!”'

'He was quite right to lament it,' said the General.

'In his place,' said Sir Simon, 'I should determine to endeavour to revive it; and I should certainly succeed. With a little care and a little patience, and a proper use of one's influence, it could be done easy enough.'

'Easy enough' was a favourite phrase of Sir Simon's, for there were so few things he had ever tried to do that it was natural all should seem equally easy to him. And he now added to this 'Easy enough,' 'If it were worth one's while.' What his while was?

Presently the little boys (Sir Simon's were all boys) came in to dessert, and their appearance was a relief, for Sir Simon was talking. They came in dressed according to the fashion of the day, in bright-coloured velvet coatees and collars of point lace, such as used to be worn only by dowager ladies, but which are now held indispensable to the

well-being of little boys. The heir to Elderslie Hall was seated next to his father; and he objected so very strongly to leave that seat when he was told at the end of ten minutes that it was time for him to retire to his bed, that Lady Howell, to avoid disturbance, gave the proper sign to Lady Allerton, and the ladies rose from table in order to induce the little boy to follow. His mother then, after a short struggle, consigned him to the care of his nurse, and seated herself with her mother and Mrs. Charlton by the open window looking out upon the terrace; while Lady Allerton, and Adeline, and Edith, and Margaret walked into the garden to discuss the guests.

‘My dear Sophia,’ said Mrs. Ramsay, seriously, ‘your ladies overbalance your gentlemen.’

‘It was unavoidable to-day,’ said Lady Howell, ‘but to-morrow it will be properly adjusted.’

“Who is it wishes for more men?” rejoined Mrs. Ramsay. ‘Do you, then, expect fresh arrivals to-morrow?’

‘Yes; Lord Hanworth and Mr. Valentine Vernon. Lord Hanworth should have been here to-day; but Sir Simon had a letter by the second post in time to prevent us from expecting him at dinner.’

CHAPTER IV.

VISCOUNT HANWORTH is a person who must be introduced to the reader with some formalities, although he was in his modest estimation of his own merits less of a personage than perhaps most people are to themselves. He was an only child, and had been in possession of his title and estates ever since early boyhood. The former was not of great antiquity, nor were the latter of vast extent; indeed, but for the circumstance of a long minority, during which they were carefully tended, and but for the unexpected discovery of some mineral wealth upon them, the estates of the young lord would have been barely sufficient to enable him to take his proper station in the world without resorting to a wealthy bride, to a colonial governorship, or to salaried political service at home.

As it was, Lord Hanworth took his seat, not, indeed, rich, but perfectly independent, and with sufficient means to maintain without inconvenience a moderate place in the country, and to indulge in the pursuits which, above all others, he loved. His mother had lived long enough to see him safely launched in life, and beyond the reach of the coarser

temptations of youth. She was not a remarkable woman ; but she loved her son, and the knowledge of that love was to him a tower of strength and a home of refuge. Through Eton and through Cambridge it was his habit to make tacit reference to what she would like to see him doing or hear him saying ; and a quiet word from her kind lips, or even a look from her gentle eyes, often had kept him right when advice might have been rejected, and reproaches have occasioned useless irritation. At school, Hanworth had been a retiring, but not an unpopular boy. He pulled a fair oar in a boat, and was never in any discreditable scrapes. His scholarship was exact and elegant, and the few who really knew him were able to predict for him a less commonplace future than would have been generally assigned to him by his cotemporaries of that time if they ever gave themselves the trouble of thinking about it.

At college, Lord Hanworth was more distinguished. If he had been so minded, and if the privileges accorded to rank had rendered it less unusual for its holders to descend into the general arena, he might perhaps have obtained the highest honours of the university. As it was, he attempted nothing in which he did not succeed. He carried off several prizes for composition ; and added to his stock of family plate a silver goblet, the reward of the best declamation in his year. Coming to Cam-

bridge from a public school, he had of course plenty of acquaintances, but he was not overwhelmed with too many friends of school-days. He had room left to enrich himself with others from the larger and more varied field which university life opened to him. Soon he was himself sought for, and also in turn seeking to become acquainted with all kinds of excellence. In his rooms the really best society of the place used often to assemble ; and surrounded by choice books and a few good works of art, there was hardly a subject that escaped discussion.

Yet Hanworth was far from aiming at the empty honours of Admirable-Crichtonship. Literature and art gradually came to engross more and more of his interest and attention. A long tour on the Continent, and more than one winter spent in Italy, afterwards fully matured in him the fine taste for art which had received its earliest development among the pictures of the Fitzwilliam Museum, and from the print-shops of King's-parade. More or less reserved he always continued to be—if, indeed, it be reserved to avoid unnecessary contact or conference with those of one's fellow-creatures to whom one is not in a condition to do good, and from whose society and conversation one does not expect improvement or pleasure. But there was no want of good manner ; and if only a few could speak of much cordiality, none could complain of that frigidity

and slight degree of inattention, which are so often more disagreeable than downright rudeness, and which are probably the surest means of procuring intense dislike. In company that he liked, no one was more charming; but when rare accident threw him among natures not congenial with his own, it would have required delicate observation to detect any expression of impatience in his bearing under its temporary incongruity. His was, in fact, a self-contained disposition, thoroughly trained in all the outward forms of demonstrative sympathy, but for all that, not the less reserved.

His friends were accustomed to speak of him as an uncommon man—his rivals were in the habit of calling him odd. In public affairs, Lord Hanworth's views were prudent and enlightened. He seldom rose to address the well-cushioned but ill-peopled benches of the House of Lords—a condition they are pretty sure to present unless some personal question or angry topic of party interest fills them with such an audience as such matters are likely to collect—and such occasions Hanworth detested. But when he spoke, he spoke well; and more than once had been pressed to accept office, which he always declined.

At the time on which our story throws its light Hanworth was between thirty and forty years old, and unmarried. It would have tried the sagacity of a stranger to fix his age with precision from his

appearance or manner. An habitual avoidance of personal subjects in his conversation cut off one usual clue; and this, coupled with looks somewhat younger than were due to his length of life, might easily mislead to a conjecture of more youth than really belonged to him. On the other hand, his thoughtful temperament and his accurate knowledge of the public events of his own boyhood and the time preceding it—a period which has not yet fallen into the province of the regular historian, and of which most men are therefore apt to be ignorant—would have led to a contrary conclusion. No long discussion, however, need continue about the age of a peer. The *Peerage* soon settles this; and no mamma who some years back thought Lord Hanworth perhaps too young, and no daughter who now perchance thought him too old, could have long remained under the influence of her own surmises on the matter.

What attacks of mammas or daughters—what covert designs which never saw the light—he may have survived or escaped, it is needless to tell. It is enough to say, that his name had never been seriously mentioned as one of the principal parties in a match—nor had his own affections ever been seriously engaged; and at five-and-thirty Lord Hanworth's was still a prominent name on many a list of eligibilities. When Charlton married, Hanworth's friends wished that he would marry too. They had

been at school and at college together ; they had travelled together ; they had been at Rome together ; they had even lived in London together : and the committees of acquaintances who duly sat to discuss the subject, agreed in unanimous reports that upon the marriage of Charlton a similar event must shortly overtake the Viscount. But they were mistaken, and some years had passed without any appearance of their reports being adopted by the only person with whom it lay to carry them out. Charlton's marriage was indeed a surprise and a blow to his friend ; but it had been so happy, and had, in fact, so little separated them, that Lord Hanworth soon became reconciled to the altered state of things, but without feeling it at all incumbent on himself to go and do likewise.

It was, in fact, to meet Lord Hanworth that Charlton and his wife had been asked to dine at Elderslie, as already related ; but an expected division, one of the few in the session that Hanworth would have cared about missing, had detained him a day longer in town. Sir Simon could more easily forgive the alteration of twenty-four hours in the time of a visit in a noble lord, than he could the delay of half that number of minutes in coming to dinner, in a poet of whom it could not be forgotten that he had sprung from the ranks of the people, although he was distinguished by a lord's friendship. Yet Hanworth was not without apprehension as to the manner of

his reception, good as his excuse was ; and as the train rolled into the station at Calverwells, the uppermost thought in his mind was how he should best appease the outraged Baronet. As he crossed the platform to secure a carriage for Elderslie he heard his own name called, and turning round, saw a little round-figured old gentleman, who gradually emerged from a pile of luggage.

‘ I cannot get these fellows to find my portmantau,’ cried a cracked voice.

‘ Let my man get it for you,’ said Hanworth ; ‘ and come with me if, as I suppose by your being here, we are bound to the same destination.’

‘ Yes, I am going to Elderslie ; and I wish I had known you were in the train. But I was late, and only just caught it ; lucky for you, perhaps, for you have escaped my company. I always am late, and yet always start sooner than other people ; and came away without my breakfast this morning.’

‘ See after Mr. Vernon’s things,’ said Lord Hanworth to his servant ; ‘ he will come with us.’

The man obeyed, but was not much pleased to find himself for the moment identified with a most ancient brown portmanteau, gaping at more than one seam, unlocked, and held together only by the straps, which seemed ready to break every minute and disclose to further view the bursting chaos of clothes and books within. The rest of Mr. Vernon’s luggage was a green baize bag, from the personal custody of

which he would by no means allow himself to be dissevered; and what it contained was a mystery never penetrated.

In a few minutes they were clear of the scattered town, and rapidly destroying the distance between it and the end of their journey.

‘Have you seen the *Times*?’ said Hanworth to his companion, who sat happily enough by his side, glad of the lift, and only wondering by what device of his own, or by what kind contrivance of the temporary owner of the carriage, he should escape paying his share of its hire; for that he would not, in fact, have to contribute to it, was past doubting.

‘No, I have not,’ said Valentine Vernon.

‘They say old Wharton has the gout again, and has been advised to retire from Parliament.’

‘Oh dear! That will set our friend Sir Simon thinking of his injuries afresh. Wharton sits for this division. What an unfortunate thing for us that the announcement of his gout could not have been kept quiet for a few days longer! It will be the death of us. Some men are bores all their lives, and contrive to be bores to the last; “the ruling passion strong in death,” as Mrs. Ramsay would say. I shall continue to be one myself, I believe, and nobody will be actually sorry for my death except the insurance companies.’

‘Do you know, by any chance, whom we are

likely to find to share this great calamity with us?' said Hanworth, with a smile.

'Oh yes! I know all about it, for I met Lady Allerton, and she always knows everything about her neighbours. There are the Ramsays there, and Captain French, and the Allertons themselves, parents and child, and Miss Somers, who is the bosom friend of Miss Ramsay, or who, as Lady Allerton says, goes about with the Ramsays. However, the truth is I know more of her than of them. I knew her father long ago, and now I know her, and that is better. The Colonel is what is called a very gentlemanly man—that is, a very dull one. To do him justice, he feels his own dulness as he ought, or perhaps you would say as he ought not, for he trusts his daughter a great deal to the keeping of her friends, and walks off to enliven his own spirits with the gaieties of Paris and the freedom of a bachelor's life. I suppose Edith is like her mother. She is a strange girl—a mass of contradictions.'

Lord Hanworth, who had been cutting the leaves of a new magazine on which his eyes were bent down, now looked up and said, 'How do you mean?'

'Why, I mean this, that she is a young lady and not affected, lively and not a flirt, clever and unassuming, pretty, and she does not know it.'

'I should hardly call Miss Somers pretty,' said

Lord Hanworth in the tone of deliberation and doubt that was habitual with him.

‘Then I suppose you have not looked much at her,’ said Vernon; ‘but I know you are a man that loves to take an exception, and I am never surprised when you contradict me. The worst of it is, if you disagree with me, you will have to agree with a great many others; and I believe, indeed, that the world in general—that is, the world we live in—is agreed as to the superior beauty of Miss Ramsay. However, I do not want to disparage Miss Ramsay—she is very rich!’

‘Miss Ramsay,’ said Lord Hanworth, ‘is certainly very beautiful.’

CHAPTER V.

WHILE Lord Hanworth and Valentine Vernon were busy in their carriage discussing the probabilities of their visit, the guests already assembled at Elderslie were not on their side idle. Mrs. Ramsay, walking up and down the terraces, arm in arm with her eldest daughter, was confidentially whispering to her in loud whispers the many reasons she had for believing Lord Hanworth partial to Margaret: the long talk in the little room; the morning visit; the meeting at a picture-gallery; the interest exhibited in Margaret's paintings; the lending of a volume of Charlton's collected works; and she ended all with—'This is the very ecstasy of love.'

'Well,' said Lady Howell, in answer, 'I really do think these are fair indications of a particular state of mind, and I cannot sufficiently congratulate you on having the luck to meet with an eccentric lord.'

'Eccentric,' cried Mrs. Ramsay.

'Yes, eccentric; do not be angry. He certainly is so; and if he were not, Margaret would have the less chance. If he cared about fashion or rank, or

the ways of the world, as most of his class do, he would not, my respected and beloved mother, be so often attaching himself to you and your party. But he likes to be unlike other people, and pretends not to see that Lady Allerton and all his fashionable friends are shocked.'

Lady Allerton was at this very moment pacing the terrace alone with a dissatisfied air, while Adeline and Captain French, and Edith and Margaret, were walking in pairs.

'I am quite vexed,' Adeline was saying to the captain, 'that Lord Hanworth is coming. You have no notion how prosy he is.'

'I do not believe your mother thinks so,' Captain French replied.

'Oh, no; I know mamma does not think so; at least, she says she does not. But he is more a mother's man than a daughter's, and I can tell you that I think him intensely prosy and intensely old.'

Captain French first burst into a shout of laughter at this sally, and then stooped to pick a heartsease, which he presented to Miss Allerton. He stooped again, and picked another for himself. Margaret and Edith just then crossed them in their walk.

'I do not,' said Margaret in a low tone to Edith, 'I do not, dear Edith, wish to disguise from you that I am very happy in expecting to see Lord Hanworth. Indeed, everything here has seemed

changed to me since I heard he was coming. The rooms have looked less stately, the servants have been less overwhelming, Sir Simon has been less intolerable, and Lady Allerton less malicious.'

Something of the chill that Edith had experienced on her first arrival at Elderslie came over her again while Margaret spoke. She could not herself wholly account for the feeling, but she watched, with something approaching to dismay, Mrs. Ramsay's indelicate and indiscreet joy over Lord Hanworth's supposed attentions, and Margaret's complete abandonment to this new affection. Yet there was no obvious reason for seeking to check it, and with a sensation that her friend required a warning, she hardly knew what to warn her against. She paused then to think before she said, 'Margaret, take care you do not speak to others as you have spoken to me.'

'Why? What is the matter? What have I said that you can find fault with? Can it be wrong to tell you that I feel happy in expecting Lord Hanworth? Edith, I know he is happy in coming here! He has been very often asked before, and this is the first time he has accepted the invitation. I learned that from Sir Simon at luncheon. What would you have? Am I to pretend to be unhappy, or can you pretend to doubt his being worthy of regard? Can you fail to see the stamp of excellence there is about him? Does he not talk, think,

and feel better than any other human being we know, with the one exception perhaps of Charlton?

‘Hush, Margaret! Speak lower; Lady Allerton is not far from us.’

‘What of that? Am I to deny that Lord Hanworth is an agreeable man, because Lady Allerton is a disagreeable woman?’

‘No; but you are to use caution in the midst of enemies. Remember that a woman always needs caution. A woman is always in the midst of enemies; the more attractive she is the more bitter they are; and she has need to defend herself with all the strength of art and concealment.’

‘Edith! art!’

‘Yes; art. I know it sounds ill; but I know that it must be used, for what is concealment but art?’

‘If you know me so little, Edith, as to think me disposed to make a general proclamation of my sentiments, we have been friends so long to very little purpose; and if you resent my confiding them to you, I will leave off doing so.’

Margaret turned away as she spoke. Edith saw that she was hurt, and reproached herself for having needlessly interrupted the flow of her happiness. She loved her warmly and truly. She had never known either a sister or a mother: she had known Margaret in early childhood, and their then dawning sympathies had opened into a friendship strong,

tender, and ardent ; such as not unfrequently takes place in youth between two women, and such as has been known, though only in a few rare instances, to exist between two men. The pain that was felt by Margaret she doubly felt herself. She took her hand, and said, ' Do not be angry with me ; do not be annoyed with my perhaps too worldly views. You know I cannot think ill of anything you say, of anything you do. You must forgive me : perhaps if you knew all that I have known and felt, in life you would not wonder at me. Do you forgive me ?'

Margaret, in answer, put her arm round her neck, and kissed her cheek. She was so happy that it was easy to her to forgive.

' Quite a pretty tender little scene for Lord Hanworth and Mr. Vernon to see !' cried Lady Allerton, as she joined them. ' And now, young ladies, look up, for here they come.'

While she spoke, Hanworth and Vernon came in view, accompanied by Sir Simon and General Allerton. Lady Allerton advanced eagerly to meet them ; Margaret and Edith stood still as they approached, and Edith fancied that Margaret's hand was trembling, and certainly she saw the blood mount to her cheeks when Lord Hanworth greeted them both. He showed no emotion himself, but it was not in his nature to betray emotion ; and he smiled quietly while Vernon nervously stumbled and

trod on Edith's gown, and the sound that followed his movement proclaimed some great destruction. Margaret stooped and lifted the muslin flounce compassionately to consider the extent of the injury. Lord Hanworth paused for a moment to consider it also, and said, 'I fear this is a serious case of damage.'

'Of course I am certain to damage anything I like,' cried Vernon, petulantly.

'“See here the rent that envious Casca made,”' exclaimed Mrs. Ramsay, joining the group, and affectedly extending her hand to Lord Hanworth.

'*Envious Casca!* what is the meaning of that phrase?' said Lady Allerton, annoyed at the position that Lord Hanworth was occupying near Margaret; 'pray who is envious here?'

'Why I am, Lady Allerton,' said Vernon, in his peevish grumbling voice; 'you know I am—you know it is my nature, and so does Mrs. Ramsay; and so she thinks because I have torn a great piece out of Miss Somers' gown that I envied it for belonging to her. Is not that so, Mrs. Ramsay?'

Mrs. Ramsay was too much astonished at finding any meaning assigned to what she said, to hazard a reply. Edith assured Mr. Vernon, as any other young lady in her place would have done, that the gown was all the better for being torn; and Sir Simon continued a pompous and quite needless apology that he had begun in the hall for Lady

Howell's absence at their reception. The train, he said, was in, certainly five minutes earlier than usual, so that she could not expect them so soon. He would go and fetch her—she was only on the lower terrace cutting some flowers, and he would go and fetch her. She would certainly be very much concerned at the appearance of inattention to her guests; but the truth was, things were so punctual in her establishment that it was impossible for her to anticipate the unpunctuality of railways.

Lord Hanworth begged to accompany him to the lower terrace to join Lady Howell, and observed, 'Though it is true that the pretended punctuality of railway trains is a very unpunctual matter, yet when we consider the enormous amount of business carried on, the constant traffic, the great difficulties where such large masses are concerned of avoiding the occurrence here and there of individual delay, and the effect that one slight delay must have in producing another, the real subject for surprise seems after all the amount of punctuality that is maintained.'

'I cannot,' solemnly replied Sir Simon, 'agree with your lordship in this particular. The vaster the business, the more important must be an exactness in carrying it on, and a peremptory resolution in the head of the department would no doubt effect this. In *our* establishment no servant is ever forgiven for the slightest unpunctuality: Lady Howell

insists upon exactness, and exactness is obtained—our gong is as punctual as our clocks. I feel confident that if the most extensive railway traffic were carried on under my superintendence, I could maintain it in perfect punctuality. It would only be to insist, and to punish, and to have proper officials, and it would be done easy enough. When I was in the House I rose to speak on this subject, but it so happened that on that occasion the House was counted out. Should I on consideration feel it right to accept the seat that I may, between your lordship and myself, admit is likely, now that Wharton is retired, to be offered to me, I should press this matter again upon the attention of the House.'

By this time they had joined Lady Howell, who with her garden-hat, a large nosegay of flowers in one hand, and a beautiful boy clasping the other, looked very handsome and very picturesque. The child made a solemn Sir Simon-like bow to Lord Hanworth; and when his mother told him to run to help Mr. Vernon down the flight of steps from the upper terrace, he walked at the stateliest possible pace. Simon Percy (the boy's name) whenever he obeyed, obeyed as slowly as he could, and Sir Simon never found fault with his deliberation, for it reminded him of himself.

'Your son,' said Hanworth to Lady Howell, as they all watched his proceeding, 'is a singular likeness of you both. It is seldom that the

characteristics of both parents are so perfectly combined.'

He was a handsome boy; and so both were pleased, only Lady Howell said, as she watched him—

'I wish he would quicken his pace; Mr. Vernon ought to be helped down those steps, he is so very blind and so very clumsy.' And she called to the boy, 'Simon Percy, make haste!'

But Sir Simon interfered, and called, 'Simon Percy, do not hurry!' Adding apologetically to his wife, 'Mr. Vernon is of less consequence than our son.'

At this very instant Vernon stumbled over the lowest step, and fell upon his face. Lord Hanworth went to his assistance, but found him fortunately injured in nothing but his temper.

As he shook the loose gravel angrily from his coat, Lady Howell expressed her regret that her boy had not reached him soon enough to avert the accident. She was very sorry; the turn of the step just there was very awkward.

'No, Lady Howell, be more sincere; it is I that am very awkward. Now do for once take my advice, and check the growth of family pride in your child by pointing to me. Clumsy, ill-made, unlucky, what have I got by my fine pedigree? A bad sight, an awkward gait, and a dreadful temper!'

Sir Simon saved Lady Howell the trouble of a reply by interposing an observation,—'Simon Percy has a proper pride.'

The flow of Vernon's spleen, however, could not be turned aside by any interposition, and he enlarged upon the chapter of his misfortunes, and eagerly narrated the history of the torn skirt.

'It is not worth a thought,' said Lady Howell; 'Sparkles shall repair it at once.'

"Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more," said Mrs. Ramsay, who had become one of the group. 'I have desired Morris to attend to it.'

'Sparkles would, I have no doubt, do it better,' said Sir Simon.

'If I were rich,' said Vernon, 'I would present Miss Somers with a new dress; but I am not, I am devilish poor.'

'You need not regret it in this case,' said Lord Hanworth, 'for Miss Somers has assured us that the dress has not suffered; on the contrary, that it is in rather an improved state.'

There was a quiet smile on his face while he spoke that provoked Edith, and she felt more provoked when she saw Margaret smile too.

She blushed, and turned away with a movement of vexation, stooping to gather a rose to conceal the flush that she felt on her face. It was a moss-rose, and she was unable to divide the stalk. Looking up to ask for Lady Howell's scissors, she found Lord Hanworth at her side. He cut the rose with his knife, and presented it to her. She thanked him, and Vernon now joined her.

‘Dear Miss Somers,’ said he, with something of an unaccustomed tenderness in his tone, ‘I wish I could do something to please you ; but unluckily for you I like you, and I am sure to contrive to harm anybody I like.’

‘“The close contriver of all harms,”’ said Mrs. Ramsay.

‘That is very appropriate, Mrs. Ramsay,’ muttered Vernon.

‘Will you take a turn with me on the upper terrace?’ said Edith, addressing him.

‘Certainly, certainly. We will walk up and down, and I will tell you my history, if you will promise to listen to it.’

Edith promised to listen, and they ascended the steps.

‘There go Mr. and Mrs. Valentine Vernon,’ cried Lady Allerton, with a spiteful laugh.

Lord Hanworth’s attention was arrested by this observation, and he paused for a moment to look after the ill-matched pair, and then followed Margaret, who had turned away from Lady Allerton. Margaret mounted to the upper terrace, and Lord Hanworth accompanied her. They joined Edith and Vernon, who were pacing up and down.

‘What, Hanworth,’ said Vernon, ‘are you come to hear my history, too? I never was so important before ; and I am very much tempted to make a mystery of it to gain fresh consequence. You know

thing just. Let's Hawthorne and you sometimes follow it. You keep back a sentiment to excite an interest; and that is why you are a sort of a lady's man in spite of yourself."

A change of colour in Lett's Hawthorne's face indicated a momentary resentment at this speech; but he only said, "I believe you will gain most importance at the present moment by speaking."

"The first time any one ever wished to hear me speak," said Vernon. "Well then, Miss Somers, what is my history? Why, about as short as myself. I was born poor, being the younger son of an earl, and I remained poor, being unlucky. My father died when I was still young. My eldest brother married early, had a large family; and with only just enough to support his title, how could he be expected to support me? But I was thought clever. "Valentine is clever," they all said; "Valentine will do. Valentine is a wit, and Valentine is a scholar; Valentine will make his way." And so I made my way into Parliament; and when I got up and said a few words the House coughed, and when I sat down again the House laughed, and I believe it was voted without a division that my speeches were bad. But I made my way into office, notwithstanding—only no sooner was I in than the Ministry went out; and I always told them it was my bad luck that forced them to resign. I have given up politics now, and taken to literature; I write for money, not for fame,

and I have brought my MSS. with me, but I like you all too well to ask you to read any of them.'

'Is that all your history?' asked Margaret.

'Do you want more?' replied Vernon. 'Ah! I guess why: a history without love is dull, and you want to know it all the more because, as you see me an old bachelor, you know I was an unsuccessful lover.'

'Oh no!' said Margaret.

'Oh yes!' said Vernon; 'unsuccessful love is the best subject for romance and tragedy.'

'That is true,' said Hanworth.

'But not in my case,' said Vernon; 'for though I was refused, I am glad of it with all my heart—at least with what heart is left to me. I asked a young girl at school whether she would leave her school-mistress, to take me for her master, and she said "*no*." And so here I am, single and independent, and ready, Miss Somers, to make an offer to you.'

'Lady Allerton,' said Hanworth, 'expects to be immediately informed of it. Did she not say so, Miss Ramsay?'

'No; I believe she knows it without information.'

A shrill laugh from Vernon at this moment joined itself to the deep tones of the gong, and Sir Simon and General Allerton appeared gradually nearing.

'Thank you,' said Edith, 'for telling us your story; but we must run in to dress for dinner.'

CHAPTER VI.

IN the course of the evening an excursion was proposed for the following day, during which the party, who might have lunched at home with perfect comfort, were to lunch in a damp room, or on wet grass, or in some other way where entire comfort would be out of the question. Sir Simon did not much approve of this mode of spending a morning ; there was a decided want of dignity and propriety about it. It might be all very well for people in a small way of life to put a basket of cold meat under the seat of a one-horse chaise, and go away somewhere to eat it. It could not much matter where or how such people eat ; but for Sir Simon's carriages and Sir Simon's powdered servants to be concerned in the transport of provisions to be eaten in an irregular way—even if the choicest specimens of cold viands, and accompanied by the finest drinks—this was a kind of solecism which he could not abide. General Allerton also, who loved his dinner above all things, and loved his luncheon in the country at this time of year only next to his dinner, protested against any unnecessary trouble and change of place

in eating it. Luncheon, judiciously managed—not too late, nor too heavy—instead of interfering with the enjoyment of dinner, rather promoted it, as he argued; but if people rode or drove to a distance, they were apt to become unusually hungry; and eating under strange circumstances, they were exposed to losing their presence of mind and eating too much; more, indeed, than was consistent with a due attention to the rights of the nobler and later meal. ‘And then we shall all spoil our dinners,’ added he, with a look of dismay which was almost tragical in the notion of woe and total destruction of happiness conveyed by it.

At the first mention, therefore, of a visit to Cowlington Priory (for every one who knew the surrounding country knew that there only could they go, because there only could the horses be well put up, and there only could a table be spread in a manner sufficiently respectable to satisfy Sir Simon) there were two dissentient voices. Dignity objected through Sir Simon, and digestion found a mouthpiece in General Allerton. The Baronet’s scruples were allayed, as they had often before been, by reminding him of the remarkable adaptation of the Priory for such a purpose, the good stabling at the inn, and at the seldom inhabited modern house, the boarded room among the ruins to which favoured visitors were admitted, and so forth. General Allerton’s alarms were soothed by the brilliant and novel sug-

gestion, that if the drive out gave an undue and dangerous preponderance to the claims of luncheon, yet the drive home might be looked to for restoring the balance in favour of dinner ; and if the day's proceedings were arranged to bring the party home by a longer road than that taken in going, so as thoroughly to dissipate the effects of the luncheon, there would be on the whole a clear advantage gained, and there would be a better appetite than on ordinary days for both luncheon and dinner.

These arguments came originally from Lord Hanworth, but were gradually brought forward and interpreted to the person against whom they were directed by Miss Ramsay and her friend, the members of the party whose wishes, as may be supposed, were most entirely bent on the proposed excursion. Sir Simon was managed separately by Lady Howell, who took him aside from the rest, to whom he shortly returned alone, and, as if of his own motion, then proposed a drive to Cowlington Priory for the following day. Coming from him, General Allerton had nothing further to say against it, and indeed he was by this time anxious to try the experiment pressed upon him ; and the thing was settled without further remark.

In the morning it was hot, and all agreed to drive, General Allerton only securing a horse to be sent forward for him, in order that he might have additional exercise on his return from the scene of

peril to which his prospects of prandial felicity were to be exposed.

Lord Hanworth and the two young ladies, with Valentine Vernon by way of protection, occupied one carriage; Mrs. Ramsay, Miss Adeline, Captain French, and General Allerton, filled a second. Sir Simon, with his son and heir, were together in another, as the young gentleman was to be gratified by pretending to drive. He in fact had better have been left to amuse himself at home, but his father thought that the presence of a child might be cited as some excuse for the expedition. Lady Howell and Lady Allerton were not of the party. The former was glad of a quiet morning among her flowers, and the latter had her 'letters to write;' for her ladyship conducted an enormous correspondence, and was always complaining of being in arrear with it.

A drive of a couple of hours brought the carriages near to the Priory.

'I think I see the ruin now,' said Miss Somers.

'Meaning me, I suppose,' answered Vernon; 'I am the only one in sight—a ruin going to see a fellow-sufferer in the decline of life.'

'No!' cried Hanworth; 'I certainly see the tower of the Priory.'

'That tower,' said Margaret, 'must in former times have been first caught sight of by the pilgrim with very different feelings from ours.'

'Perhaps not altogether so very different in kind,

although more powerful in degree,' rejoined Edith. 'You know pilgrimages were one of the excitements of the days in which they flourished, just as picnic parties are of our own.'

'For shame, Edith!' escaped from Margaret; and a smile passed across Lord Hanworth's countenance.

'For my part,' continued Vernon, 'I am disposed to agree with Miss Somers; I always do agree with her, and she knows that I shall support whatever she chooses to venture; but I would rather be a pilgrim to a pigeon-pie than a pilgrim with only the chance of eating the peas out of my own penitential shoes.'

'Ah! Mr. Vernon, I know you are incorrigible,' said Margaret. 'Does the first view of these fine remains of the piety of other days excite in you no veneration for the devotion and self-sacrifice of the men who founded this once glorious establishment?'

'The devotion, I take it, had an immediate object in view—"the greater the sinner, the greater the saint;" and as for the self-sacrifice, I doubt if there was any of that. The money spent in building monasteries could neither have been put into the Three per Cents., nor laid out in good purchases of land; and if a gentleman chose to spend it in labourers' wages, instead of in making war upon his neighbours or his sovereign, I conjecture he found he got as much amusement out of it that way as the other. However, I suppose we ought to feel obliged

to the builder of Cowlington to-day, for to him we owe it that we are now here; and if you want to praise him, I am bound in common decency to listen to you.'

'We may at least all join,' said Lord Hanworth, 'in praising the taste, whose ever it was, which selected this beautiful spot for the building; and those of us who are artists can at the same time call up a vision of the magnificence of the perfect edifice, and also be grateful to the destroyers who put it in the way of becoming so picturesque.'

Margaret had her drawing materials by her side, at which Hanworth glanced as he spoke; but she only said—

'I cannot think why they were put in the carriage: I shall have no time to do anything to-day;' and before the proper remonstrances could be made against her modesty or indolence, they stopped at the outer gate of admission to the precincts of the monastery.

The rest of the party had already entered, but Sir Simon stood at the portal to receive his friends; and when all were again assembled together on the piece of velvet greensward in the centre of the quadrangle, there was some delay in proceeding until the gardener could be found who had the keys of the church. Although it was a private day, on which the ruins were not generally shown, Sir Simon's party were not the only persons present, for a photographic

artist had established his camera in one corner, and was busily engaged in taking views with it.

‘There,’ said Lord Hanworth, ‘is one other person who certainly prefers the ruin to the complete building.’

‘And yet,’ questioned Margaret, ‘are not the details of architectural symmetry better suited to the science of the photographer than all that picturesqueness of decay that gives such pleasant indulgence to the feeling and expression of an artist?’

‘You mean, I suppose,’ said Hanworth, ‘that he is using a mechanical contrivance to create a picture, and therefore that the more regular and mechanical the subject, the better fitted it must be for the application of his implement. But that is not exactly true, because some of the most successful and beautiful architectural photographs are from the quaintest and most irregular subjects. After all, I suppose it is only because they are incapable of motion that buildings come out so well, and that is an advantage they have in common with statues, and indeed with all inanimate objects.’

‘Ay, I wish they would stick to inanimate objects,’ cried Vernon, ‘or at least not meddle with the human face divine.’

‘Yes; “they imitate humanity most abominably,”’ chimed in Mrs. Ramsay. ‘And no daughter or young friend of mine shall ever sit “too much i’ the sun” for her portrait.’

‘Putting aside the want of colour, and all the disadvantages with which we are familiar,’ said Lord Hanworth, ‘and supposing the process to be mechanically perfect, and able to reproduce at pleasure an exact fac-simile of the sitter, yet its very instantaneousness is fatal to the highest truth of resemblance.’

‘That is not peculiar to photography,’ said Edith. ‘Does not Campbell say, “painting, mute and motionless, steals but a glance at Time”? And is not this just what the photographer does?’

‘Not exactly; and Campbell’s line must not be quoted in support of your notion,’ replied Lord Hanworth. ‘A picture can of course only represent things or persons as seen at one instant; but that one instant is an imaginary one, and has been chosen by the mental power of the painter from his observations of many instants, which have contributed to form the one ultimately selected for perpetuation. A greater than Campbell has written, “That is the best part of beauty which a picture cannot express; no, nor the first sight of the life.” Lenses and chemicals cannot be expected to succeed where the eye itself fails.’

‘Well, well,’ interrupted General Allerton, rather impatient at the discussion; ‘if we stand talking here much longer, the gentleman in the corner will be taking our portraits, whether we like it or not; and we shall find ourselves in all the shop-windows

of Calverwells. So let us be moving. Here come the keys.'

This motion was seconded by Sir Simon, who was always extremely sensitive to the mention of Calverwells, and declined being in any manner talked of in connexion with it.

'It would certainly be unpleasant to be exposed to that. We have been standing here quite long enough.'

And following the authorized guardian of the place, the whole party moved onwards, across the quadrangle, round which the dormitories probably stood formerly, and into the cloisters which led to all that was left of the church.

'Have you known these ruins long?' inquired Margaret of their conductor, an old man, with a reverend silver beard, which she longed to transfer to her sketch-book.

'Why, yes, miss. Man and boy, I have known them these sixty years and upwards.'

'Have they changed much in that time?'

'Ay, ay; many a good bit of them have I seen come down; and now it takes a deal of money to keep the ruins in repair. For all that, last winter's frost brought down a great piece off the large tower; and I would advise none of you ladies and gentlemen to go near the place where it fell, for I think it is all rotten above, and a stone might fall at any time.'

So they went round the ruins. The old man told his accustomed tale, which was courteously listened to, and then they strolled about in groups, and talked or were silent at intervals.

Lord Hanworth and the young ladies talked architecture, and were learned about Early English, Decorated and Perpendicular. Captain French and Miss Allerton talked over the merits of the last ball they had been at together; and then treated a hypothetical case of a young couple marrying in high life 'not very rich,' and endeavoured to settle whether such an imaginary pair could do with only a brougham in London, and whether a country-house was habitable without a billiard-room—a topic which seemed to require a great deal of attention, and which gradually led them away to a distance from the others, for the greater convenience of discussion. General Allerton thought Vernon a bore because he did not understand him—a sentiment which was very cordially reciprocated by the ex-official, because there was nothing to understand in General Allerton; and Mrs. Ramsay, left for a time between them, found it difficult to keep the peace. She indeed had little attention to spare from the other group; and eagerly watched every gesture of Lord Hanworth as he pointed to wall or window, and put her own interpretation upon each look and movement.

Sir Simon had a favourite speech on the Poor Laws, which he usually introduced when visiting

Cowlington Priory, *apropos* to the suppression of the monasteries ; and he hovered about Lord Hanworth, waiting for a favourable moment to commence upon it. His facts were generally all wrong, and his only argument was an appeal to his descent from the original of his great family portrait—an argument which admitted of no dispute, and which was always produced when he got into any difficulties—not, indeed, that a gentleman talking nonsense is by any means always aware of being in difficulties. But in Sir Simon's own mind, the circumstance of his great-grandfather having been a Chancellor of the Exchequer, constituted himself a great financial authority ; and it was perhaps well for his friends that he was content to rest his claims upon that only. On the present occasion, however, just as Sir Simon was catching at a remark that one of the later windows could hardly have been finished when the storm of the Reformation swept down upon the building, a door opened, and a servant coming from it announced that luncheon was ready.

General Allerton's face lighted up visibly. Vernon stopped in the middle of a sentence which was to expose General Allerton's last piece of ignorance. Mrs. Ramsay took Sir Simon's arm. Miss Allerton and the Captain were summoned ; and all passed into a rough chamber where enough had been done to make the more romantic of the party regret that they were to be so comfortable. They actually had

a table with a cloth upon it—chairs to sit upon—and had not even to wait on themselves or each other. So that if Mr. Vernon had not upset a hamper, and caused the breakage of the champagne as he shuffled blindly round the room to find a place at the table, everything would have passed off as if they had been at luncheon in the usual room at Elderslie; and customary associations were so far predominant, that this part of the day's business, thanks to Sir Simon's precautions, did not offer any features of undignified exhilaration. Indeed, the only person who was sorry to quit the room was young Simon Percy, who had revelled in an extent of good things which would have been hardly possible at home; for Mrs. Ramsay was not so fond of the usual responsibilities of a grandmamma as to think it her duty to supply the place of his absent mother, and restrain the appetites of the boy.

Another general stroll round the ruins was to occupy the time for preparing the carriages to return homewards, and a few steps brought the party to the angle of the building described as dangerous. A light fence had been placed round the spot, within which lay a few fallen blocks, from which the eye naturally ascended to seek the more recently fractured surfaces of stone from which they had detached themselves. As all stood gazing upwards, and Sir Simon was again preparing himself to make his remarks on the Poor Laws, a gaudy butterfly

alighted and expanded its wings upon a small bush within the forbidden ground. Before he could be stopped, the boy darted from his father's side to get a closer view of the insect, and at the same moment a loud rending sound made all start, and voices from every side called to Simon Percy to come back. But it was too late ; a large stone had left its resting-place of ages, and was actually in the middle of its descent to the earth before the precise danger was perceived. There was barely time for any one to do anything, if indeed the fascination of terror had not paralysed all. But Edith, who was standing at that part of the fence nearest to the child, who in the bewilderment did not know which way to turn or run, burst through the slender railing, and seizing him by the shoulder, dragged him backwards just as the huge mass fell with a heavy thud, and dented deep into the turf upon the very spot occupied by him one instant before.

All thought he was saved, and a burst of joy and thankfulness was on every lip, when the boy turned deadly pale, and blood began to flow down his face. It was evident that one of the smaller fragments which accompanied the large stone in its fall had struck him, and that the injury might prove to be a serious one. The course, however, to be taken was clear. No medical advice could be had nearer than Calverwells, and it was at once decided to take the poor child straight home, while a servant, mounting

General Allerton's horse, was to ride to the town and summon the family attendant, or in his absence some one else, to proceed to meet his patient at Elderslie. Soon they were again in the carriages; but on their saddened return in different order from that of the morning. Simon Percy was Margaret's care, and on her lap he lay on the road home. Mrs. Ramsay and Edith followed Margaret and her charge to that carriage, and Hanworth was about to leave them to find a seat elsewhere, but was invited by Mrs. Ramsay to take his place as before. He might be useful, as they had lost their servant.

Poor Mrs. Ramsay, whose affections were as strong as her understanding was weak, was very deeply moved—not affectedly sentimental, but seriously agitated. She loved her grandson not less than his mother did; and her fears, as was natural, greatly exaggerated his injury. The sight of Margaret's handkerchief reddened by his blood made her turn pale; and she lent back in the carriage, trembling and sobbing, forgetting to quote, and rendered respectable for the moment by real strong feeling. Edith held her hand compassionately, and said,

'I do not think, dear Mrs. Ramsay, that he is much hurt, but he has been frightened; and you know it is natural that he should for the present appear greatly shaken. It was an alarming position for him.'

But while she tried to encourage Mrs. Ramsay, her own face was pale. As she turned from Mrs. Ramsay to the little boy her eyes met Lord Hanworth's grave look, and he said,

'I am afraid *you* are not unhurt.'

'I assure you,' she replied, 'I was not touched—not even grazed; and it was better for me than for those who looked on.'

Her voice shook a little as she spoke; but she was determined to command her own emotions, and to feel only for Margaret and her mother. While she stooped towards Margaret, and took her hand, Lord Hanworth stooped forward too, to look at the boy, and unclasped his belt, which was uncomfortably tight, as he lay across Margaret's lap. He gently asked him if he felt better, and if he thought he could sit up; and Simon Percy said he would try, only he was afraid of making his face bleed and of seeing the blood; on which Hanworth took out his own handkerchief and bound it carefully round his temples. Edith adjusted his cap over it, and Margaret supported him in a sitting posture with her arm. After awhile, the sense of the fresh air and the exhilaration of the movement through it, began to revive him. He announced himself much better, and soon talked in his accustomed manner.

'How lucky,' said he, 'that I was saved. If Edith Somers had not caught me, I might have been killed; then Harry would have been heir to Elders-

lie ; but papa and mamma would have been very sorry, would they not, aunt Margaret ? for mamma calls me her own particular pet. And Edith Somers might have been killed, too ; might she not, aunt Margaret ?

‘For God’s sake, my dear child,’ said Margaret, passionately, ‘do not go on supposing such terrible things as these. Let us be thankful for your deliverance, and suppose nothing more.’

‘Come,’ said Edith, ‘aunt Margaret is getting tired. Now that you feel well, come to me.’

But as she spoke, Lord Hanworth drew him upon his own knee, and there he sat contentedly till they reached home.

On their arrival Lady Howell was informed that her boy was safe before she knew that he had been in any danger ; and afterwards Sir Simon related the adventure at considerable length. But before it was quite finished the medical man arrived, and then Simon Percy was duly examined, and was pronounced quite uninjured. The hurt on the temple was trifling, and would leave no mark. It might be well to put him to bed early, in a soothing point of view ; but there was really no cause for any sort of uneasiness. Upon this there was great shaking of hands, and bowing and smiling at the doctor, as a man is always pleasant who gives pleasant tidings. Lady Howell, with an emotion quite uncommon with her, walked across the room, and kissed Edith ;

and Lord Hanworth, with a sudden impulse, shook hands with Lady Howell. Mrs. Ramsay recovered her complexion, her affectations, and her poetical extracts, and described very particularly to Lady Howell and Lady Allerton Lord Hanworth's demeanour in the carriage, and his silent attention to Margaret's feelings, asserting, in a tone of hysterical exaltation, that 'not a hair perished,' and that 'on their sustaining garments not a blemish, but fresher than before.'

CHAPTER VII.

THE day after an eventful day is apt to be a dull day—flat, empty, and tedious—a day that is always looking back, and therefore inattentive to what is going on. And so it might have been at Elderslie after the excursion to the Priory, but that Lady Howell was resolved that so it should not be. She was a skilful hostess, and no sooner were the incidents at the Priory enough discussed than she excited the general interest of her guests by the announcement that an archery meeting on her lawn, which in her notes of invitation she had spoken of as a possible event, was actually to take place in three days from that time.

‘And there could not be a better meeting,’ said Lady Allerton; ‘there is nothing like archery for bringing young people together.’

‘That is why I am asked,’ said Vernon.

‘No, Mr. Vernon,’ replied Lady Allerton, who was a very young-looking woman of her age; ‘you and I, who are well stricken in years, are asked to make an effective contrast to the rest.’

‘Ah, Lady Allerton, where are your years? not on your person—you have some way of getting rid

of them. You dispose of them to your hair-dresser or to your lady's-maid. But the blessed advantages of science and art are not available to me, and that is the worst of being an old *man*.'

Lady Allerton reddened through her rouge, and walked to the window, inwardly meditating future revenge.

'What tremendous fun it will be,' said Adeline; 'and I have brought all my archery things with me.'

'It will be glorious fun,' said Captain French; 'and I have brought all my toggery with me.'

'Margaret, dear, have you remembered yours?' asked Lady Howell.

'Oh, yes; you told me, you know, that you were likely to have a meeting here.'

'But I have no bow,' said Edith.

'“I witness this, that every miss but me has got a beau,”' muttered Mrs. Ramsay, quoting a comic song of Hood's, and half ashamed this time of her inverted commas.

'You may have mine,' said Lady Howell, 'for I do not mean to shoot, myself.'

'But do you mean to shoot any of us?' asked Vernon.

'No, Mr. Vernon,' said Lady Allerton; 'Lady Howell will leave that business or that sport to you.'

'“There be some sports are painful, and their labour delight in them takes off,”' said Mrs. Ramsay.

‘I would do my best, Lady Allerton,’ said Vernon, ‘but that unluckily, like Miss Somers, I have no bow.’

‘I dare say you are glad to be like Miss Somers even in a defect.’

‘You have said so for me; if you had not, I should have been too bashful. Now I shall try to make a merit of it, and say it out loud. Miss Somers, I am very glad that I have got no bow, because it makes me like you.’

Lord Hanworth, who had been engaged before in playing with Simon Percy at draughts, turned round at this speech, and looked first at Vernon and then attentively at Edith.

‘He is actually trying to trace a likeness,’ said Vernon; and Hanworth withdrew his eyes, and, addressing Margaret, said—

‘Miss Ramsay, is it true that Miss Somers is unprovided for archery?’

‘I believe not,’ replied Margaret; ‘I think my sister has provided for her.’

‘And I conclude Sir Simon will provide for me,’ said Vernon.

Lady Howell laughed. Lady Allerton shrugged her shoulders.

Sir Simon stepped deliberately forward and began a deliberate harangue. He trusted he could provide for Mr. Vernon—he had no doubt he could provide for Mr. Vernon—he had a bow, a beautiful bow, the

best bow in the country—whenever he drew that bow he was sure to make a famous hit. He was not ashamed to say that he had been a great shot—he was not ashamed to say that he believed he might have been the champion of England—he was not ashamed to say that he was a good shot no longer, for when his immediate and close attendance was required to public affairs, he had thought it his duty to shoot no more. His bow remained idle and unstrung, and it was very much at Mr. Vernon's service. This was the end of his speech.

‘I am very glad of it,’ said Vernon; ‘and if the bow is so good, I will try hard to make good use of it. If Lady Allerton will be so kind as to kneel down for me to-morrow, I will shoot a pippin off her best bonnet, and Miss Ramsay shall draw me in the character of William Tell, and Charlton shall write a sonnet about it.’

‘Charlton *has* written something about liberty and William Tell, I fancy,’ said Lady Allerton.

‘I believe,’ said Sir Simon, pompously, ‘that the story of William Tell and the apple is now generally supposed to be a mere fable.’

‘And I believe,’ said Lord Hanworth, ‘that all history is now generally supposed to be a mere fable.’

‘If it is all a fable I need not learn it,’ cried Simon Percy, clapping his hands and laughing.

‘My dear, do not excite yourself,’ said his mother;

‘it is bad for your poor dear head after your accident.’

‘And it is really of no use,’ said Edith, ‘for you must learn it just the same as if it were true. There is hardly anything true in this world, and if we learnt nothing but what is true, we should all be very idle indeed.’

‘Is *that* true?’ said Margaret, addressing Lord Hanworth.

‘I suppose it is true that Miss Somers thinks so,’ replied Hanworth, glancing at Edith.

‘Now,’ said Lady Howell, ‘whatever you think on other matters, I am decided that you are to think this of your archery meeting, that the prizes are worth fighting for, and that to do honour to Sir Simon’s house his guests must win them.’

‘What are they?’ said Lady Allerton.

‘A bracelet for the lady, and a silver arrow for the gentleman.’

‘Poor dear gentleman!’ said Lady Allerton: ‘what will he do with it? This is one of the few occasions on which the lady comes off the best.’

‘It is well known,’ said Vernon, ‘that we care more for the glory of the thing and less for the gain.’

‘The glory is all,’ said Captain French. ‘We must set to work; we must indeed.’

‘We must get our bows and practise uncommonly hard,’ said Adeline.

‘We must practise confoundedly hard,’ said Captain French.

The afternoon was accordingly passed in severe practice: if it had been a drill ordered by Government it would no doubt have been pronounced cruel, but as a matter of choice it was esteemed pleasant; and the archers marched up and down between their targets for three hours under a broiling sun without a murmur. Only once or twice Vernon gave a little groan, but it was soon suppressed, and he was consoled by the care that Edith used in trying to teach him. The conversation at dinner chiefly concerned the exercise of the day, and it was pronounced that Miss Allerton was the best shot, which would have made Lady Allerton very happy, only that it appeared to make Captain French very happy too. After dinner, Margaret and Adeline found themselves strolling together on the terrace. There was no sympathy between them generally, but just now there seemed to be some feeling common to them both. Margaret was abstracted and dreamy, and Adeline seemed to be thinking also—for three minutes.

At last,—‘How very well Lord Hanworth shoots,’ said Margaret.

‘Oh, yes; and how uncommonly kind Captain French is in picking up the arrows,’ said Adeline.

‘I confess that archery is a pursuit in which I

could become deeply interested,' said Margaret, 'and I wish that I shot better.'

'Oh, it is only a knack, easily learned by practice,' said the good-natured Adeline; 'and I should be extremely glad to help you on. I can quite understand your being anxious about it' (meaningly), 'because of a certain lord; and I hope you will win the lady's prize, for I am sure he will win the gentleman's—he is so particularly sure and true, and his composure is such a help to him.'

'Yes, he is very sure and true,' said Margaret; and she added, in a tone of regret, 'I wish that I had half his composure.'

'Oh, you will soon learn it,' said Adeline; 'it is all a knack. Now, listen, my dear child—only do not you tell of me—I mean to be up preposterously early to-morrow morning before breakfast to practise, and I believe Captain French means to come too, and I hope you will join us, and you may tell Lord Hanworth of course, only nobody else.'

Margaret did not wish either to assist at a meeting with Captain French, or to invite Lord Hanworth to it, and replied with decision, 'By no means; pray, Miss Allerton, do not propose such a thing; as for me it is out of the question. I can do nothing before breakfast.'

'Hush! not so loud,' whispered Adeline, pressing her arm tightly; 'my mother will hear.'

A sharp voice at this moment called Adeline, and a soft one said 'Margaret.'

'Our mothers are calling us,' said Adeline, continuing her whisper: 'and see, the gentlemen have come into the drawing-room, and Lady Howell is going to sing, and do you know I really do think her singing intensely good; do not you? Do you know only yesterday Captain French was remarking to me that it was a thousand times better than most amateur singing, and papa said it is not at all like amateur singing.'

'I quite agree,' said Margaret, 'that it is unlike most amateur singing, for it is careful and skilful, and there is due attention paid both to the words and to their accompaniment.'

'Yes,' said Adeline, 'and though Lady Howell is not exactly a feeling person herself, her singing is really immensely expressive.'

'She has a true feeling for music,' replied Margaret; 'and as to the words, she makes use of her understanding.'

'And most amateurs, you know,' said Adeline, 'have so little understanding, or else they are uncommonly slovenly.'

With this they entered the drawing-room through the conservatory. Lady Howell was singing the well-known ballad of,—

If she be not fair for me,
What care I how fair she be?

and her rich voice and clear accentuation riveted the attention upon the words and meaning of the song. General Allerton, who added a taste for music to his taste for eating, applauded the song vociferously, and said, 'It is all good together ; words, and tune, and voice ; by Heaven it is, it is deucedly good ; by Heaven, it is confoundedly good.'

'Yes, it is confoundedly good,' said Captain French.

'The two things I most admire in the song,' said Lady Allerton, 'are the singing and the sentiment ; do not you, Lord Hanworth ?'

Lady Allerton never left Lord Hanworth alone for more than two minutes on principle, hoping at once to disengage him from the Ramsays and to win him for her daughter by means of her own attractions. Lord Hanworth looked up quietly from a treatise on archery he was turning over.

'As to the singing,' said he, 'I believe there can be but one opinion.'

'Oh ! of course,' replied Lady Allerton, 'the singer being present.'

'Quite independent of the singer's presence.'

'Well, but you say nothing as to the sentiment.'

'The sentiment belongs to a man who has no sentiment ; in fact, to a sensible man.'

'Ah, you know it is just such a man as you.'

'I do not know ; I have no reason to believe that I am a sensible man.'

‘That is because you have not been tried, Hanworth, as I have,’ said Vernon. ‘Now, I know I am a sensible man, because I thought the lady ugly directly she had said *no* to me.’

‘I confess,’ replied Hanworth, ‘I doubt whether I could aspire to such a degree of sense as that.’

‘I cannot imagine you, however,’ said Lady Allerton, turning towards Adeline, who was looking out of window with Captain French, ‘mooning about after a disdainful fair one.’

‘I cannot imagine myself mooning about after anything,’ said Lord Hanworth; ‘but I cannot suppose that I should think a woman’s beauty less because she thought nothing of mine.’

He smiled as he spoke, and turned towards Edith, who was leaning against the pianoforte, and then he rose, and leant over the back of the chair on which Margaret was seated. Margaret had been an attentive listener to the dialogue, and now feeling conscious of Lord Hanworth’s approach, she looked up for a moment, approvingly at him, and said in a low tone, ‘You are surely right.’ She was drawing on a piece of letter-paper, and her pencil fell from her hand. Hanworth picked it up, and as he gave it to her said, ‘What are you drawing?’ She held the paper towards him. His face was suddenly flushed, and with more eagerness than he usually betrayed, he said, ‘How excellent!’ Margaret’s face was now flushed too, and she said in faltering tones, ‘I am glad you

think so. I was anxious to do justice to the subject.'

'You have, you have,' said Hanworth, and he caught hold of the sketch as if to retain it, but Margaret gently drew it from him, and said, 'it is not yet finished.'

Lord Hanworth gave it back to her, trying to look as if he had not intended to keep it.

'What is the subject of this admirable sketch?' asked Lady Allerton, with an emphasis on the word admirable that seemed to mean abominable.

Neither Margaret nor Hanworth was able to reply, and Vernon leant over with his glasses and said, 'Oh, it is our adventure of yesterday; Simon Percy in danger, and Miss Somers coming to the rescue. Miss Somers is very like, and so I am sure it is done for me.'

'No,' said Lady Howell, 'that subject must be for me.'

Margaret continued her drawing, and was silent; Lord Hanworth walked to the window; Adeline and Captain French walked out of it; Lady Allerton, with an angry shrug of her shoulders, went out after them, muttering that the night dew was bad for Adeline.

'“Put up your bright swords, the dew will rust them,”' said Mrs. Ramsay, and followed them all three.

'What a beautiful night!' said Edith. 'Look,

Margaret, how the moon has struggled with those clouds we were afraid of, and has got the better of them !'

'Charlton would tell us that this is how a fine soul should defeat its troubles,' said Hanworth.

'And so it should,' replied Edith.

'No,' said Hanworth ; 'a fine soul should have none.'

'Sophia, are the Charltons coming to-morrow?' asked Margaret.

'Yes; they are to come to-morrow to have two days of good practice before the archery.'

'Oh, how very glad I am!' said Edith.

'And oh, how very envious I am!' said Vernon. 'How I wish, Miss Somers, that I were a poet, to make you glad of my presence.'

'Any one can be a poet that chooses,' said Sir Simon; 'it is only just to think a little, and get a pen and write down your thoughts, and cut them into syllables and count them out, and then the thing is done easy enough. I mean, of course, blank verse like Wordsworth's; rhyme like Pope's is rather more difficult.'

Margaret and Edith interchanged a look—it was irresistible; and Lord Hanworth too looked back from the window with a smile.

'Nobody writes like Pope now-a-days,' said Lady Howell, who knew the fashion in every department.

'No; we all write like Wordsworth now,' said

Hanworth, 'do we not? Is not that so, Miss Ramsay, Miss Somers?'

'Yes; like Wordsworth and Shakspeare,' replied Edith.

'Just so,' said Sir Simon, with perfect good faith; 'all blank verse.'

And now the four who had gone out to look at the moon entered. Adeline flung herself down on a settee, very hot; her mother flung herself down on an ottoman, very cross; Captain French whistled a tune in the window, and whistled it false; Mrs. Ramsay stretched herself exhausted on the sofa, and said, "'On such a night as this"—oh dear me!—"sit Jessica."'

'What an artful little puss that Jessica was!' said Vernon.

'An artful little devil!' cried Lady Allerton, with sudden emphasis.

'Why—what was her devilry?' asked Hanworth.

'She ran away with a beggar, and robbed her father!' said Lady Allerton, with a flashing look at her daughter.

'But I suppose,' said Hanworth, 'she was only anxious to secure a good dowry for her husband, and he was a better man than her father. Besides, she did it because she was very much in love, and it is held as a virtue to be very much in love.'

'So it is, if you are in love with the right person. But this is not a subject to discuss with you, Lord

Hanworth ; you have studied books, not women—you cannot be expected to know what a woman ought to be.’

‘ And yet I believe I do know,’ said Hanworth ; and his looks followed the figures of Margaret and Edith, who were now strolling together on the terrace. He left Lady Allerton and joined them.

‘ I wonder,’ said Edith, ‘ how many sonnets have been written in all, since the time when sonnets first began, to the moon.’

‘ I wonder,’ said Margaret, ‘ of all the poetry addressed to the moon, how much was worth writing.’

‘ Southey,’ said Hanworth, ‘ has been a successful moonlight painter. Do you happen to remember some fine lines in his *Roderick* ?’ and looking up, he repeated, with his melodious voice—

How calmly gliding through the dark blue sky
The midnight moon ascends ! Her placid beams,
Through thinly-scattered leaves and boughs grotesque,
Mottle with mazy shade the orchard slope.

Here he paused for a moment ; and Margaret murmured, ‘ Oh, go on.’ He then continued—

A lovelier, purer light than that of day
Rests on the hills ; and oh how awfully,
Into that deep and tranquil firmament
The summits of Auseva rise serene !
The watchman on the battlements partakes
The stillness of the solemn hour ; he feels
The silence of the earth ; the endless sound
Of flowing water soothes him ; and the stars,

Which in that brightest moonlight well nigh quenched,
Scarce visible, as in the utmost depth
Of yonder sapphire infinite are seen,
Draw on with elevating influence
Towards Eternity the attempered mind.
Musing on worlds beyond the grave, he stands,
And to the Virgin Mother silently
Breathes forth her hymn of praise.

When he came to the end of the passage, Margaret was still hanging on the sound in a kind of rapture, and Edith herself could not refuse to be charmed with tones so peculiarly, so exquisitely sweet. Lord Hanworth's voice was full and clear, and there was a sense of melody in his recitation that made a tune to the words, or rather that suffered the words to make their own tune, while all the modulations of passion were true, tender, and delicate. It was an irresistible music; and it was followed by silence—for common terms of praise are rejected by genuine feeling. When Edith did, after a long pause, speak, it was only to say, 'I wonder that Southey's poetry is so unpopular, so little known; there is so much in it that deserves to be admired.'

'I cannot say,' replied Hanworth, 'that I share your wonder on this head, though I do agree with you that there is much in it that deserves to be admired. There is also little to be loved. Southey's imagination too often amuses itself beyond the boundaries of human sympathies; he too often allows his learning to encumber him, and he is too fond of

strange gods. When he talks to me quietly and feelingly of a moonlight night, as in the passage I have just quoted, I listen to him with pleasure ; but when he seeks to lead me through his subterranean caverns to contemplate his Hindoo gods or devils, I stumble and faint at the entrance.'

'I have been all through all the scenes of *Thalaba*,' said Edith, 'with great delight ; and it seems to me a more original, a more imaginative, and even a more passionate poem than *Roderick*. Do you remember the description of night there—that fine description of the moon shining upon the desert, with the solitary mother and her child?'

'Yes,' said Hanworth ; 'there you have instanced the one scene of true poetry that occurs in the whole long poem. How much there is besides of overcharged imagery, of supernatural tedium, with angels of death and maidens of snow, and sentiments with which we cannot sympathize ! I admit the brilliancy of Southey's fancy, and the extent of his capacity ; but I do not find fault with the public for not loving his poetry, since I cannot love it myself.'

'I am sorry,' said Edith, 'to hear *Thalaba* spoken of so slightly. It is a poem that I care for very much.'

'It is,' said Margaret, 'a favourite with Mr. Charlton, and he has read out to us from it many choice passages.'

‘That must account for Miss Somers’ approval,’ said Hanworth.

‘No,’ replied Edith, with something of resentment perceptible in her tone, for she detected a shade of satire in his. ‘I should certainly be inclined to defer to the taste of such a man, and to a great extent to submit my judgment to his; but it could not make me like what I disliked.’

‘What, then, is the meaning of deferring to the taste and submitting to the judgment?’

‘I did not say that I actually deferred, only that I inclined to defer.’

‘The distinction is a nice one; and I believe it is a feminine characteristic to follow the inclination.’

‘Do you mean,’ said Margaret, ‘that we always follow our impulses?’

‘I believe I do; but then, you know, your impulses are always good.’

As he spoke, Lady Allerton appeared at the open window, and said, ‘Lady Howell has rung for the bed-room candles, and we are all retiring.’

On this they entered the drawing-room, and as they were passing out into the ante-chamber, Adeline whispered to Edith—

‘I am going to practise early at the target to-morrow morning; do join me, like a good creature.’

‘With pleasure,’ said Edith, quite unsuspectingly; and at that moment Lord Hanworth, who had just

handed Margaret's candle to her, came up and said,

'Good night.'

The two friends were both apparently exhausted with the practice of the day, for they spoke less than young ladies generally are wont to speak when they are supposed to be sleeping, and much less than was their own particular custom. The morning, however, found them with recovered spirits; and Edith, while she was dressing, informed Margaret of Adeline's invitation to her for early practice, and her acceptance of it.

'You had better not go,' said Margaret; 'Adeline is a very foolish girl.'

'I am certainly not prepared to say that she is not a foolish girl; but she is, nevertheless, a good shot, and by practising with her I am not likely to catch any of her folly, while I may possibly catch something of her skill.'

'Are you aware that Captain French is engaged to meet her? That is why I refused to do so. He is an intolerable coxcomb; and besides, it has too much the air of an appointment.'

'Why, if he is engaged to meet her, it is an appointment; and I suppose we are wanted to take off somewhat from that appearance. This, I must say, alters my feeling; and yet, poor girl, it may perhaps be unkind to expose her to the anger of that intriguing, odious mother. Margaret, I have sometimes thought myself' (Edith's voice fell while she

spoke) 'especially unhappy in having no mother; but I am sure it is better to be motherless than to be the daughter of Lady Allerton.'

'You must try to look on my dear mother as yours,' said Margaret, caressing her; for Margaret was so fond of her mother that she saw no fault in her, and Lady Howell's unconcealed contempt for Mrs. Ramsay's understanding was a frequent subject of division between the sisters.

'Your mother,' replied Edith, 'has indeed been a truly kind friend to me. But come, let us peep out of the window and discover our archers.'

'There they are,' said Margaret, 'both before the target; but talking, not shooting.'

There they were, indeed; Adeline in a becoming morning costume, and Captain French surveying it as if he thought so. They took two or three turns, and then Adeline took a shot. She hit the gold. Captain French clapped his hands, but they were just then interrupted. A third joined them. It was Lord Hanworth. A sudden colour on Margaret's face reflected itself for a moment on Edith's, and they withdrew from the window. Margaret was very much agitated, and to Edith's surprise she hurriedly put on her garden hat.

'Why, Margaret, where are you going? Not to join them? You told me you had refused to go.'

'Oh! but it was quite foolish, quite needless—you said you were going. I shall go too. You were

certainly right. I am sure it is much better and much kinder to go.'

'But I am not sure, Margaret. The only motive, the only hope to be of use to Adeline by making a third, is removed by Lord Hanworth's presence.'

'I do not care about motives. I intend to go. Come with me, Edith; if you have any regard for me, come with me. But I shall go whether you do or not.'

Margaret moved to the door as she spoke. Edith perceived that it was in vain to seek to detain her, and hoping to shield her from any impertinent observations, she accompanied her, but it was with an indescribable feeling of reluctance that she did so. This indefinable sense of something wrong was however relieved by the evident pleasure with which Hanworth greeted them, and presently she was able to interest herself in the progress of the shooting, and to feel glad that Hanworth was, contrary to the general expectation, a better marksman than the young Captain. In a little time Simon Percy joined them, and freely made his remarks.

'What fun archery is! Papa says that our archery meeting will be a splendid thing. Mamma says that nobody else in the county has such fine grounds for it. I wonder what my great, great, great-grandfather in his robes in the library will think of it? People are to have ice in the library. Captain French never hits the target. His arrows

always fly too high. I know that, because I heard Lady Allerton say so last night. I want Edith Somers to win the lady's prize, because she saved my life; but still I love Aunt Margaret best, because she is my own aunt. Mamma says Lord Hanworth will win the silver arrow.'

'If I do I will give it to you.'

'And I shall give it to Aunt Margaret. Oh, no, I forgot—I must give it to Edith Somers, because papa says I owe her a debt of gratitude.'

Edith smiled, and said she would give him credit. Adeline and Captain French laughed loudly, and Adeline said aside to the captain—

'He ought to be Hanworth's son, he is such a prose.'

At which aside the coxcomb laughed more loudly still. The sound of his laugh brought Lady Allerton to them, with a smile on her lips that tried to cover a contraction on her brow as she surveyed the party, according to her eye so badly grouped. For Hanworth, Margaret, Edith, and the child occupied the foreground, and Adeline and Captain French were together in the distance.

'Adeline,' said she, 'you have practised too much before breakfast. Your father is quite astonished that you can do it.'

This was the signal for all to leave the archery-ground for the breakfast-room, where General Allerton was just making the first incision into a Perigord pie.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE two days of practice appointed for the Charltons were well used, and Charlton showed a fair degree of skill, and was very glad of the excuse the shooting gave him for being out of doors, away from Sir Simon ; for he found his temper too much tried in his company, and Lady Allerton's was not much more tolerable to him. Luckily the marching between targets was too monotonous for her to endure with patience, and after a few shrugs of the shoulder, and a few smart sentences, a few cuts at Edith and Vernon, and a few words of flattery to the poet and to the lord, she generally retired from the field, her short presence only serving to strengthen the sensation of satisfaction at her absence.

On one of these occasions, when she had been especially impertinent, Vernon whispered to Edith—

‘Now, are you not glad she is gone? Depart from the common ways of women, and tell me the truth.’

‘I will tell you the truth,’ replied Edith. ‘I do not want to think whether I am glad or not : I only want to enjoy the present, and not to mar it with any disagreeable recollections.’

‘You are right, said Lord Hanworth, who overheard them; ‘let us enjoy the present fully, as it deserves to be enjoyed.’

His face was turned so that only Edith could see it; and the look that he fixed upon her had in it an expression both earnest and tender. Edith became conscious of this, and it was indeed not the first time that such a consciousness had painfully struck her; she wished he would look some other way, she did not like it; she became agitated and she dropped her arrow. Charlton picked it up, and suggesting that she was tired of shooting, invited her to take a turn with him in the shrubbery; but Vernon interfered, and said he was sure she required further practice, but that he was the last man to be surprised at Charlton’s desire to carry her away. ‘By-the-bye,’ added he, ‘have you seen Miss Ramsay’s clever likeness of Miss Somers?’ Charlton had not, and expressed a wish to see it. Vernon asked leave of Margaret to go and fetch the drawing. Margaret replied, with a certain embarrassment in her manner, that she should have been very happy, but that she did not know where the drawing was.’

‘Oh, but I know,’ said Vernon, ‘for I saw you put it into the pocket of the green portfolio.’

‘It is not there now, it is lost: I have looked for it. Indeed it is not there; it must have dropped out of the pocket.’

‘Lost! impossible; you will never do so good a

likeness again. Miss Somers, do you not resent being lost ?'

' I do resent the loss of Margaret's sketch.'

' You do resent it—then resent it firmly. Summon the whole establishment upon the lawn, pounce upon the guilty housemaid, and tell her that, guilty as all housemaids are, inimical as their race is known to be to mankind generally, and destructive of those few blessings that nature grants, she of all housemaids is most guilty. Hanworth shall harangue her, and Charlton shall curse her in an ode. What do you say, my Lord ?'

He looked round for an answer, but received none, for Hanworth was gone.

' It is not worth any more inquiry,' said Margaret, shortly ; ' I will do another—the same, only better.'

' I suspect,' said Adeline, who had joined them, in a loud whisper to Charlton, ' that Lord Hanworth has stolen it.'

' Come away, Edith,' said Margaret, ' it is time for us to go and prepare for the reception of the guests : in another hour they will be here.'

The arena upon which the possession of the archery prizes was to be disputed was a level meadow, lying a little off one side of the main road of approach to Elderslie Hall. The rows of targets were duly placed north and south of each other, and the sward between them was mowed and rolled into

the smoothest surface. Tents were erected for those who were to take no active part in the business of the day, but were to be only spectators of the shooting. The meridian refection, however, which was to support both performers and lookers-on under their exertions, was not to be eaten on the ground, but in the long library of the house, converted into a banqueting-hall for the time. On this occasion, Sir Simon's notions of comfort and dignity met with almost general approval. Only a very few enthusiastic shooters might possibly regret the time to be abstracted from the important duties of the day in walking to and from the house. To many of the spectators it would be a relief to escape for a while from the business of the ground, so interesting to those actively concerned, so much the reverse to the bystanders. To them the occurrence of the luncheon, in which all can take a part, would furnish an agreeable variety from their previous comparatively passive existence.

Clever people however need not be dull anywhere, and the sufferings of the stupid may be considered as amply compensated for by the joy of all the young people in the rare event of a general gathering in what was esteemed a very quiet neighbourhood. The hour that was to elapse before the expected arrival of the guests was passed much as such hours usually are. The young ladies were dressing themselves and talking; the elder ones were dressing

and not talking, for with them the cares of the toilet were become elaborate and serious; Lady Howell was giving some last judicious orders to insure perfect punctuality, and the little boys were having their hair crimped somewhat in the manner of the Nineveh sculptures, and their deepest Brussels lace frills properly adjusted. By degrees the result of these praiseworthy pains showed itself in the assemblage in the drawing-room. When Margaret, Adeline, and Edith entered it, they were received with applause by Lady Howell, Mrs. Charlton, and Mr. Vernon.

‘The hats were just as they should be,’ Lady Howell said.

‘The jackets admirably becoming,’ said Mrs. Charlton.

And Vernon stood on tiptoe to see their faces, and said—

‘Now would be the moment to call Sir Joshua to life to do a portrait of Miss Somers: she looks really like a Sir Joshua; and if Lady Howell will but give her a frame, and she will but stand still, she may pass for one of his famous portraits as she is. What do you say, Charlton?’

‘That I am often reminded of Sir Joshua’s subjects by Miss Somers.’

‘They are clever, faded things,’ said Lady Allerton.

‘But I am sure Miss Somers does not look faded

to-day,' said Adeline; 'she looks quite fresh and bright.'

'Yes, Edith is flushed,' said Mrs. Ramsay, '“flushed with a purple grace she shows her honest face;” but never mind, dear, do not turn away and look disturbed.'

'Why should she?' said Lady Howell; 'we all know it is not rouge. She would have lent some to Margaret, no doubt, if she had had any, and Margaret is as pale as one of Raphael's palest Madonnas. Now, just observe what a model of indifference she is; she does not look even as if she heard me, but I know she does. Eh, my little sister?'

Margaret was leaning upon her bow as she stood in a recess by the window, and her perfect face showed no change. She was absorbed in some secret meditation.

'Oh, dear me, now,' cried Vernon, who had turned round to look at her; 'what shall I do? I have dropped my eye-glass; I am nothing without it—I know nothing, see nothing, think nothing without it.'

'“The glass of fashion and the mould of form,”' observed Mrs. Ramsay.

'If I have not found it by the time your first people arrive, I may just as well go to bed,' continued Vernon, petulantly.

Edith stooped to help him to look for it, and so

did Charlton; then he knelt down himself to hunt, and knelt on it and broke it. This was a real calamity. What could he do? The loss of his glass was positive blindness to him, and it was quite true that he might just as well go to bed. Lady Allerton advanced towards him at this crisis of distress.

‘Mr. Vernon,’ said she, ‘I am near-sighted, myself: I have two glasses; will you condescend to borrow one of mine? Here it is, at your service; will you try it, or are you too proud?’

‘Condescend! Lady Allerton; condescend to borrow an eye! Why, I will kneel at your feet for it, and I will publicly pronounce you the best-natured woman I know, if the number suits me.’ With this he lifted it to his eye. ‘Thank you. Really I can see with it—not so brightly as I sometimes do, but still enough to discern the target, and if luck favours me, to win the prize, which I beg, Lady Allerton, you will consider yours in advance.’

‘I thought,’ said Charlton, ‘that the prize was to be Hanworth’s.’

‘Where is Hanworth?’ asked Lady Allerton; ‘Adeline, where is Hanworth?’

‘I do not know, mamma; he never tells me where he is going; but I dare say he is poking over a book.’

‘Yes, he is in the library,’ said Mrs. Ramsay. ‘I spoke to him as I passed. I looked in and I said, ‘My lord, your library is dukedom large enough;’

and he said, "It might be, only it is not mine;" and I left him, for he seemed to like to be alone. I think he was drawing.'

'He draws very well,' said Charlton.

'He seems to do everything well except feel,' said Lady Allerton; 'but he is as cold as an icicle.'

'He is as easily melted,' said Charlton.

'Is it possible,' cried Mrs. Charlton, who had not been enough in society to hear with polite indifference a friend abused, and whose whole face was in a glow with the warmth of her feeling; 'is it possible that any one who knows Lord Hanworth at all can believe that he has a cold heart? Can any one look at him and think so; can any one hear his voice and think so?—is not his face all benevolence—is not his voice all tenderness?'

'Now, Lady Allerton,' said Lady Howell, 'you are to answer that! Has not Mrs. Charlton convinced you that Hanworth is a perfect mixture of tenderness and benevolence?'

'Mrs. Charlton has convinced me,' said Lady Allerton, 'that she is all tenderness, and has enough to spare for another lord after she has given the due measure to her own. Mr. Charlton, I admire you that you are not jealous!'

'Lady Allerton, I do not admire you for that sentiment,' replied Charlton, and turned away from her.

'Then you are as uncommon a man as I have

always thought you,' said Lady Allerton, quite unblushingly; 'for most men, and especially most poets, admire those ladies who admire them. But you and Hanworth are a strange, unaccountable pair.'

'Lady Allerton,' said Mrs. Charlton, carried away by the earnestness of her feeling, 'I am resolved that you shall know the reason I have for esteeming Lord Hanworth.'

'By all means; I shall be most happy to listen,' replied Lady Allerton, while a shrug of her shoulders showed her impatience. Listening, indeed, was an art in which she was not accomplished, and which was particularly difficult to her when she was requested to hear any good of any neighbour. But while she wriggled and shrugged, Margaret stood silent and erect by Mrs. Charlton's side, not moving, scarcely even breathing, and with an air of determination not to lose a syllable.

Mrs. Ramsay approached with an eagerness that was bustling and affected; the very reverse of Margaret's, which was so still because it was real.

"Let me not burst in ignorance, but tell," cried Mrs. Ramsay.

Vernon drew near; 'And for my part,' said he, 'I am more afraid of bursting when the thing is told. Lady Allerton and I are both in a horrid tremor lest we should hear of anything virtuous. We hate to listen to good of our friends—it makes us feel so bad ourselves; you need not groan,

Charlton, that is only because we are truly humble. When we hear something very vicious, we feel ourselves a little more comfortable, a little more easy, a little better, and we call it deliciously wicked. Miss Somers, I do believe, sympathizes with us, for she has turned her back and pretends to be thinking of nothing but Simon Percy's curls.'

Mrs. Charlton turned towards Edith, and smiled, and then said—

'You must not be afraid of me; I have no long history to tell, only this: that I was not more than sixteen when I first became acquainted with Lord Hanworth, and that in a great extremity of misery he suddenly appeared as a deliverer, a protector, and a friend. It was at Rome. My poor father was an artist, an artist of great genius, I believe—yes, I am sure of great genius; but his genius could not extricate him from his struggles with its enemy, poverty. Unhappily, he married early. Children were born to him. My mother's health failed. He had no fashionable friends to give him a name. He painted well—but he painted in vain. Pictures that showed his feeling, his reading, his fine thoughts, filled his studio—but few ever went out of it. Debts accumulated; and worn out with labour, with disappointment, with mortification, he fell ill himself. A more fortunate brother painter, who was his friend, felt for him, and did all he could to relieve him, but he had not the means to be of any great service,

until one day he was inspired with the happy thought of bringing Lord Hanworth to see my father's studio. That day was to me a holy one in the calendar. Lord Hanworth's fine taste, fine feeling, real knowledge of art, at once told him of the merit of the pictures he saw; and the worn-out look, the sick wife, and perhaps the friend, told the painter's poverty. The generosity, the delicacy with which he relieved it, I cannot describe to you—indeed I cannot. Even now, when so many years have passed, these recollections quite overwhelm me.'

And excited, agitated by her review of the past, Mrs. Charlton stopped in her narrative, interrupted by a sudden flow of tears.

'My dear creature,' said Lady Howell, 'pray do not cry; your eyes will be so red; and besides, there is Simon Percy looking at you. I am always telling him it is so foolish to cry; and indeed I think it is.'

'“Tears, idle tears. I know not what they mean. Tears from the depth of some divine despair,”' said Mrs. Ramsay.

'Pray do not; it is so bad for me,' said Vernon. 'You are raising the waters with me, and I am blind enough without them. Do leave off. I said how you would distress me if you told me anything good of anybody, and you would persist, cruel woman! There is that kind-hearted Lady Allerton never thinks of doing me such a mischief.'

‘That is because it is not in my power,’ said Lady Allerton. ‘These romantic things have never happened to me. *I* had not the advantage of being brought up in poverty.’

Margaret now leant down, and kissed Mrs. Charlton’s cheek, and passing her arm round her waist, whispered low—

‘Go on—go on, or these people will be coming to interrupt us.’

‘Well,’ said Mrs. Charlton, ‘Lord Hanworth admired, praised, and bought up my father’s studio. All those pictures, the fruit of long study and labour, the subjects of hope and of neglect for so many years, were now taken from the walls against which they leant—they were taken to adorn Lord Hanworth’s house, and purchased at very high prices. It was not the sudden relief from poverty—it was not even the means afforded to discharge the burden of unpaid debts that exalted my father’s broken spirits to unlooked-for happiness—it was the sense of the appreciation of his genius. And this was Lord Hanworth’s true generosity. It was not the mere giving of money, it was the sympathy with the painter’s feelings. As long as my father lived he made his life happy.’

“And all for love and nothing for reward,” said Mrs. Ramsay, wiping an imaginary tear from her eye with an embroidered handkerchief.

‘And not at all for “l’amour de vos beaux yeux”’

said Lady Howell, with a searching glance ; for it was in her nature to seek for a selfish motive in every generous action.

‘No,’ said Mrs. Charlton, ingenuously ; ‘he never even looked at me, though I was generally thought pretty then—even very pretty.’

‘You need not say then,’ said Vernon. ‘Excuse the impertinence of an old bachelor, Mrs. Charlton, but it is just the same now. And I am thinking how lucky it was I was not at Rome ; for if I had been, I should have got my second rejection infallibly. I am quite sure I should have blundered into that studio, and have asked you to share my blindness, my queerness, my poverty, my ill shape, and my ill temper——’

‘“And the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to,”’ said Mrs. Ramsay.

‘I see,’ said Mrs. Charlton, ‘how kindly you really sympathize with all I have told you ; and now I must go on to say how, when my poor father died, my mother and I found in Lord Hanworth a considerate, a perfect protector ; Mr. Charlton was his friend, and they had visited us together in my father’s lifetime. And now I need say no more, for you all know that I am Mrs. Charlton ; and I think I hear the sound of carriage-wheels.’

Mrs. Ramsay on this walked to the glass, and adjusted her cap-streamers. Vernon, in imitation, walked to the glass, and adjusted his short grey hairs.

Lady Howell seated herself with an air of unconcern. Lady Allerton touched up the feather of Adeline's hat. Margaret for a moment closely embraced Mrs. Charlton. Edith went out to stroll on the terrace. Lord Hanworth entered the room just now, looked round him, caught a glimpse of Edith's figure outside, said something about his bow, and went on to the terrace too. He joined Edith, but he had not been by her side half a minute when Lady Allerton appeared there, and she said if he were going to stroll on the terrace she would stroll with him. She was quite of Miss Somers' opinion, that it was well to be out of the way while the first arrivals and first introductions were going on. And why should not three elope as well as two? She hoped she was not one too many. She hoped there were no secrets. Edith replied hurriedly, and in accents that betrayed vexation—

‘You are mistaken in supposing that I came out to avoid the first arrivals. I came out to consider the contents of a letter which I have received this morning, and now I shall go in again to satisfy my curiosity about the guests.’

‘You had better not. I believe there is a horrid number of hobbdehoyes and clergymen; each to set off the other, for each would be the most tedious thing on earth if it were not for the other. The one cannot be agreeable, and the other thinks he must not. Is not that so? Had not Miss Somers better

stay where she is ? I mean, of course, where we are ?

Lady Allerton spoke significantly, but before she ended her sentence, Edith had gone in. Lord Hanworth, who had hitherto appeared engaged with the equipments of his bow, now turned towards her and said—

‘ You have roused in me a wish to see these arrivals, and I think we had better follow Miss Somers.’

Lady Allerton, swelling with spleen against Edith, passed her arm through Hanworth’s, and entered the drawing-room with him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE first carriage which came upon the ground brought the rector's family. The Rev. Dr. Silverston was himself the patron of the living held by him, and it had been in his family for some generations. It was not a very valuable one; but supported by private means and with the prestige of county-familyship, the rectory folk always took a good place in society. The rector had been tutor of his college at Oxford, and a Bampton lecturer, which may suffice to vouch for his learning and theology; and in other respects he was an excellent model of a parish priest. He had formed his opinions and notions of duty before Exeter Hall was built or thought of, and before the art of theological dancing on the tight-rope had been brought to perfection by the opponents of that remarkable institution. The old lions and monkeys were roaring and chattering on the site where the May-meetings are now held, long after the rector had added D.D. to his name, and he was a good way up on the list of those who bore that dignity in the University Calendar before the writers of the Tractarian publications began to compete with Evangelical activity in the Church. He was equally

respected and liked both by rich and poor, and for the same reasons. He dealt kindly and wisely with both. He was as ready with his sympathy as his purse for the poor ; and as he did not confine his interpretation of charity to almsgiving, he had as much of that virtue to bestow on the rich, his equals, as he had for the poor, his inferiors. With meet difference of expression, the rector exhibited the same courtesy and firmness to all classes of his parishioners ; and while assuming no power which did not belong to him by law, usage, or custom, he, in fact, exercised a broad and beneficial influence over all who came within its reach.

In the matter of archery, when that sport first within living memory made its appearance in the neighbourhood, divers appeals had been made to Dr. Silverston to set his countenance against so vain and worldly a pastime. Miss Surtanage in particular had violently endeavoured to rouse his opposition to it. This lady occupied the best cushioned pew in church, and was generally supposed to be the person who circulated the pink tracts which arrived every month in nice envelopes at almost every house in the parish. These were at once made into spills, or reverently consigned to the fire by the best disposed among those who were favoured with them ; but they sometimes made ungodly sport, and on the whole may safely be said to have done more harm than good. But none of Miss Sur-

tanage's remonstrances against the new amusement had their intended effect upon Dr. Silverston. They took a variety of forms. Sometimes they were urged by word of mouth—sometimes in anonymous letters describing a dreadful elopement in an adjoining county, which was entirely owing to archery; and sometimes by letters in the county newspaper signed 'A Young Lady,' which announced the most disastrous consequences as ensuing or to ensue from the promiscuous use of bows and arrows. The cholera, and a recently reported failure to convert the inhabitants of the Lotoopooa Islands to Christianity, were among the least of the evils to be traced to it.

Nevertheless, Dr. Silverston, undeterred by the public and private exertions of Miss Surtanage and her coadjutors, did not think it unbecoming him to assist in promoting a healthful, innocent, and social amusement, and now appeared in his own proper person as the principal occupant of the rectorial phaeton. With him came his daughter, who had been so long his daughter that she was not ever likely to be anything else; but who, although she drew no bow herself, liked to see other people enjoy themselves. The rector's son, too, was there (much younger than his sister), who officiated as his father's curate, and trod worthily in the paternal steps. There was also another son at home for the university long vacation, and whose age belonged to the

debateable land between boyhood and manhood. He was a mighty archer ; but unless when at his work before the targets, suffered and caused to suffer from the shyness and self-consciousness proper to the very disagreeable portion of life—for social purposes—to which it was for the time his misfortune to belong.

Other arrivals rapidly followed, lay and clerical ; and among the latter it may be noted that various shades of opinion prevailed. Some of the clergy stayed away and had tea that evening with Miss Surtanage, when they comfortably denounced the sinful amusements of worldlings over their muffins ; but among those who came there was not an entire uniformity of sentiment. There were subtle difficulties of conscience and curious compromises to be observed. One very popular curate, who might have been a successful competitor for the prizes, had joined the practice meetings previously held on divers lawns, but did not feel it consistent with his duty to appear as an active bowman on the great day at Elderslie. Poor fellow ! his fingers were itching to be at the bowstring ; but he went through his self-imposed penance with tolerable equanimity, and without inflicting his case of conscience upon too many hearers—indeed only upon those who taunted him with his defection at the last moment.

There were county lords and county ladies, other baronets than Sir Simon, city knights appearing as country squires, a few officers from a cavalry dépôt

at some little distance, and a goodly show of youth and beauty, high-born and middle-born, among the ladies, who formed a part of almost every arrival.

Mrs. Lacy, of course, was there—always genteel and always complaining, yet disposed, as this was one of her most cheerful days, to make the best of the grievances she was propounding. ‘It was certainly a very hot day;’ which was not at all the case, for it was as perfect a day as could have been ordered for the occasion. ‘But then if it had not been very hot, it might have been very cold, which would have been a great deal worse.’

Her young friends many of them looked pale, sadly pale—indeed deplorably pale; but then that was the natural effect of heat. Lady Howell would certainly find it all fatiguing, sadly fatiguing—indeed, deplorably fatiguing; but then it was so kind to undertake so much fatigue for her friends. General Allerton, to whom some of these observations were addressed, remarked that all would be fresh and well enough after luncheon; and Sir Simon graciously expressed his satisfaction with the ordering of the weather. It was exactly as he would have arranged it if he had had the doing of it—a bright, but not a broiling sun, a gentle air, but not enough to affect the flight of the arrows. He could not help noticing that a garden party at Elderslie generally commanded a suitable day. The English climate was not often favourable to such meetings, but at Elderslie it was

always as it should be. Lady Howell interrupted these observations by a proposal for a procession to the field, in which the shooters were to walk in double file. Vernon, who appeared to be impatient for the shooting, perhaps because he was tired of the conversation, said he was ready to head the procession; but Lady Howell looked towards Hanworth. He was standing near Edith, and he drew nearer as if to offer her his arm; but she retreated behind Miss Allerton, and Lady Howell said, 'Yes, that will do very well. Lord Hanworth and Miss Allerton lead the way.' '“ Marshal them the way that they should go,”' said Mrs. Ramsay, and looked round perturbedly for Margaret. She was standing between Charlton and his wife, and there was a shade of care on her countenance. Charlton offered her his arm, Captain French found himself obliged to escort Edith; and so it happened, as it often does happen, that none of the principal performers were satisfied with the cast of the parts. Vernon stumbled along outside the line un-paired, and muttered as he went, trying to approach Edith, 'Well has our great moralist observed, "celibacy has no pleasures."' But however painful this arrangement might be, it had the merit of short duration, for once arrived at the shooting-ground, arms were unlinked and prisoners set free.

And now the strife began. Adeline Allerton stood up gracefully and joyously, and sent off her

arrows true to the mark ; for although she believed herself very much in love, she was not at all agitated, and as her second arrow hit the gold the sound of Lady Allerton's applause and Captain French's was heard above the praise of the trumpet that was appointed to signalize such a triumph in the field whenever it occurred. Some others among the ladies shot fairly, but when Margaret came forward, her extreme beauty and her close relationship to the hostess, with the knowledge that in England never fails to gain respect, of her being possessed of a considerable fortune, made her the object of particular observation. There was a consciousness of beauty in her bearing generally, at once an expectation of homage and an indifference to it ; but that wonted indifference gave way now to the influence of the new sentiment that had taken its place in her heart, and the composure of her demeanour was slightly ruffled as she directed a hurried glance towards Lord Hanworth and saw him standing apart, with his eyes thoughtfully bent upon the ground. Her hand shook, and her arrows fell wide of the target. When Edith Somers took her place, Vernon offered himself to pick up her arrows, and Charlton leant eagerly forward to watch her success, while Hanworth directed towards her a grave earnest look. She was aware of this look, and distressed by it ; why should he fix any attention upon her ? why had he not taken his place by Margaret's side ? The uneasy

apprehension, the pang of doubt that had struck her before, returned with double force. During the last three days, Hanworth's manner had seemed to her to lose its usual tranquillity, and she felt herself too much the object of his regard.

These reflections sent a flush to her cheeks, but she was resolved to surmount her agitation; she was determined that she would not appear troubled by such a look; if Lord Hanworth were not her friend because he loved her friend, then he was nothing to her, or worse than nothing, and she would not shoot less well because he chose to turn his glance upon her; so fixing her own eyes steadily on the target she drew her bow with a resolute hand. She shot at first very well, and Charlton and Vernon whispered to each other that she would probably beat Miss Allerton. But some ideas would intrude upon her which were uncomfortable and perplexing, and under the influence of which her spirits became wearied. She joined listlessly in the sport, and she had no notion who was gaining the day till Lady Allerton's voice roused her attention with this remark, 'Was ever anything so provoking, so ill-contrived, so irritating, so depressing, so thoroughly stupid? There is that hobbedehoy, Silverston, getting all the best shots: he will win the day; he will have the prize; not that I envy him the silver arrow, but to think that a hobbedehoy, who is to be a curate' (mark the awful combination), 'should be the hero of the day.

Miss Somers, I give you leave to beat Adeline out of the field if this is to be the partner of your glory. Look at him—look at the awkward creature; he is stepping aside, and Sir Simon is paying him a solemn compliment. Now Hanworth says something agreeable to him in his benevolent way; it is wasted benevolence, for which the youth will only hate him. He is both shy and conceited, like all his race. Now there is Mr. Vernon going to begin. He has got my glass luckily for us all, for without it he would not hesitate to mistake one of us for a target.'

And so Lady Allerton talked on, and Edith made languid attempts to listen till the consciousness of a sudden blow on the back of her head put an end even to these attempts; and with the sense of a forgetfulness coming on of all around her that she welcomed and yet felt she must contend with, she clasped the hand and threw herself upon the support of the only woman in the world whom she truly disliked, for Lady Allerton happened to be near her. Lady Allerton's exclamations told her what had happened. 'The wretched man! the wretched man! he has done it at last. I knew he would shoot one of us;,' and then Vernon hurried up to her, called her Edith and entreated to know how she felt. His unlucky ill-shot arrow had lodged, happily not in her head, but in an arrangement of ribbons beneath her hat which acted as defensive armour. Lady Allerton had drawn it out, and as she exhibited

it to Vernon she told him that he ought to feel himself the luckiest man in the world to have escaped in this way when so near doing a serious injury. Fortune, she said, clearly favoured the blind, and if they did awkward things no harm came of it. The force and surprise of the blow had discomposed Edith, but she was not otherwise hurt, and she soon recovered sufficient self-possession to feel annoyed that Lord Hanworth was close to her, and that there was an extreme solicitude in his manner and countenance, that he hurried, it being so little his custom to hurry, to obtain for her a glass of water, and that when he offered it to her his hand shook and his colour changed. She thanked him, she did not want it; she was really very well. He feared that was impossible; he knew it was her habit to think little of herself, and therefore her friends must think for her—she must allow him to lead her to the house. He offered her his arm as he spoke, but she declined it, saying she needed no support. He walked by her side; Charlton joined them, and Vernon also, in a state of dejection. He had, he said, always hated himself, but never so much as now. Presently, running towards them, out of breath, and pale with emotion, Margaret met them, Simon Percy running on before her, and crying at the top of his voice, ‘Edith Somers is shot; Edith Somers is shot!’ No sooner did Margaret see Edith really safe than, shaken by

the quick revulsion of feeling she experienced, she burst into a fit of tears and caught her in her arms. 'My dear, dear, dear Edith, why was I not near you? are you hurt? when did it happen?' Lord Hanworth and Charlton moved on to leave them together for a while; but when they joined them again Lord Hanworth, with a gentle kindness, endeavoured to reassure Margaret, and when she said she feared she must appear very foolish to him, he replied tenderly, that it was impossible that any degree of anxiety should appear foolish for such a friend.

The sound of the punctual gong told them now that it was time for luncheon; and Edith felt glad that she might go in and sit down quietly, and as she hoped unnoticed, while the rest were engaged in the portion of the day's performances most certain to be universally interesting. But her hopes were destined to be disappointed; and the moment she entered the drawing-room she was overwhelmed by anxious inquiries from a number of persons not really in the least degree anxious, unless to break the monotony of ordinary conversation by commenting on what might well be called an event. Foremost among the questioners was Mrs. Lacy.

'It was a very sad interruption, to be sure; a deplorable interruption indeed to the gaiety of the day. She had known persons, particularly the niece of her second cousin, Mrs. Hamilton, feel the effect

of a blow on the back of the head all their lives. The person she alluded to—of course she spoke in strict confidence—was certainly sixty, but she still felt the effects, though she was only twenty' (she supposed that was Miss Somers's present age) 'when she received the blow. The poor dear creature was very stupid ever since—rather deaf, she thought, and certainly very stupid.'

Edith laughed, and said, 'she could well imagine such an effect; and she hoped, if she appeared so presently, they would kindly attribute it all to the blow.'

'Are you quite sure,' said Lady Allerton, 'that your friend was not stupid before she was struck?'

'Oh no! not at all sure; but it was no doubt a sad event; and most distressing to all her friends. Yet they must naturally be thankful she was not killed, just as all must be thankful in Miss Somers's case—thankful, truly thankful, that she most providentially wore ribbons in her hair.'

'I felt that, Mrs. Lacy,' said Vernon, in a husky voice, coming up to her at this moment; 'and see what I have done. Lady Allerton, in pulling out the arrow, pulled away some of the ribbon with it, and I got hold of it. I am not an honest man, Mrs. Lacy; I do not consider myself honest, for I know I am poor, and I always doubt the honesty of poor men. The rich can afford to entertain that virtue, but we younger sons really cannot; and so,

with my principles, it did not cost my conscience much to add a petty larceny to the assault, and to keep this pretty ribbon for myself.'

He flourished it in the air as he spoke, and a very small knot of ribbon dropped from it. Edith saw it drop, and saw Lord Hanworth pick it up and put it in his waistcoat pocket silently, and, as he probably thought, unobserved; but this trifling action corresponding too well with her previous apprehensions, so much affected her that she found herself obliged to sit down, while an almost stunning pain seemed to press upon her head. Lady Howell noticed her paleness, and handed her a smelling-bottle. Mrs. Ramsay fluttered about her in sentimental agitation, enough unmoved to indulge in quotations, and remarked to Lord Hanworth that the 'damned arrow glanced aside,' an observation that was overheard by Mrs. Lacy, who, ignorant of the inverted commas, deplored to her next neighbour the melancholy fact that a lady of so graceful an exterior as Mrs. Ramsay should be addicted to swearing; and the fact was in due time of course reported to Miss Surtanage, who was not in the least degree astonished when she heard it: for what else could be expected of those who were given up to this world's pleasures and frivolities, even at an advanced period of life?

Sir Simon's punctuality, however, and General Allerton's appetite, would not suffer the gong to sound in vain; and now the procession to the library

took place, where a costly entertainment was prepared. From this procession Edith sought to withdraw herself, for her spirits were tired, and she longed for a few moments of peace. But the hobbedehoy who had offended Lady Allerton by his success at the target, now offended Edith by his polite behaviour. It is the misfortune of his species to offend even in their virtues, and this young man was disagreeable only by his merit. He remembered his sister's advice to attend to any one whom he saw neglected; and fancying Edith neglected because she was sitting alone, he advanced to her and said, with the bow that Lady Allerton despised,

‘Oh! will you take my arm?’

‘Thank you,’ said Edith; ‘I prefer sitting quiet.’

‘Oh! but then, will you allow me to fetch you something to eat?’

‘No, thank you. Indeed, Mr. Silverston, I must confess to you that I feel unwell; my head aches. I know that quiet is the only remedy, and I want to be quite alone while luncheon is going on. If you wish to oblige me you will not mention to any one that I am here; I am anxious that my absence should remain unnoticed.’

The hobbdehoy was a well-disposed one; so he made no attempt at a compliment, but simply said, ‘Oh! I am sure I am very sorry,’ repeated his bow, and left Edith alone.

CHAPTER X.

IN an arm-chair by the open window Edith sat for a time with her face covered by her hands, then roused herself, read the letter she had gone out with the intention of reading before, sat down again and cried. She was in a painful position, full of doubt and perplexity, with no friend to appeal to. What was the meaning of Lord Hanworth's manner? Had he ceased to care for Margaret, or had he never cared for her? Had Mrs. Ramsay's chattering folly deluded her high-minded daughter into an unsolicited affection? Was it possible that he could be blind to Margaret's beauty?—that he could fail to appreciate the fine qualities of her heart and understanding—that he could fail to see how her accustomed dignity of manner was changed when he was near, and yielded to an undisguised and admiring deference? What could make him so blind when she saw it all so well? Could it be a preference for herself that absorbed his attention; could she be so very unfortunate as to have attracted his regard? If it were so, what an unpardonable whim! but then he was a whimsical character. Lady Howell was right

there; yes, even Lady Allerton was right in that; he delighted in eccentricity; he pleased himself by doing something unexpected. Why should Margaret so much like such a man? Was not that a whim too in her, when there were so many others younger, handsomer, to admire and to love her?

Ah! had he been a strong, earnest, simple-minded, straightforward, chivalrous man—such a man as she had once known; such a man as Charles Stirling: the Charles Stirling who was at one time the most frequent, the most welcome visitor at her own home—she could not have been surprised at this enthusiastic affection for him. And then Edith's thoughts, out of tune with the present, went back to past days. But of what use could that be? Why should such a remembrance thrust itself upon her? Had she not resolved to banish those old times from her mind; had not this friend, this man so dear in her regard, this man whom she might have loved, had he not accepted an appointment in India without a word to her? And had he not remained there now for three whole years without once seeking to communicate with her? Had she, then, not been mistaken in him, as Margaret might be now in Lord Hanworth? But no; her heart would not admit the notion: Charles Stirling might have changed—something, she knew not what, might have changed him; but he had once loved her. And to this dim shadow of a past love she must still cling.

She rose from her chair; she wished to shake from her these forbidden recollections, and she again forced her attention upon the letter she held in her hand. It was from her father: an indifferent, a selfish, and a cruel letter. He continued to find Paris very agreeable; he had written to his house-agent to let his house in London; his mode of living in Paris would not suit her, and she must manage to stay on with her friends. 'Manage to stay on with her friends!'—at the very moment that she felt it for the first time in her life an imperative duty to leave them. Yes, it was a duty; she could not conceal it from herself. This uncertainty as to Lord Hanworth's feelings must be put an end to; she must leave him no excuse for seeking her society with her friend's. She must depart from Margaret's side; but how? to whom could she go? Vernon, who seemed her surest ally, was an old bachelor; there was only Mrs. Charlton to appeal to. But how would that be? What right had she to force herself upon the kindness of the Charltons? How cruel was her position; how dreary it was in any grief to be alone, with the one tender friend who had been so true, so confiding with her, shut out from the knowledge of her oppressive secret.

Fresh tears came up with these thoughts; but now the buzz of approaching voices was heard, and dreading to meet the penetrating glance of Lady Allerton, the gentle inquiry of Margaret, the awkward kind-

ness of Vernon, and above all, perhaps, the solicitude of Lord Hanworth, she escaped out at the window, and hurried towards the walled garden, where she might remain for a while undisturbed, intending as soon as she recovered her composure to join the shooters again.

She reached this quiet garden safely, without the sound of any pursuing steps. It was always, to her feeling, the most peaceful, the most comfortable, the least pretentious portion of ground at Elderslie, and now she welcomed it as a sheltering friend. She seated herself under the shade of its high walls with a feeling of security ; she was away from the great glare of the sun, away from the noise of voices ; her tired eyes rested upon the green enclosure where the sun-dial stood, and the cool still water of the little fish-pond was in its undisturbed repose pleasant to her to look upon.

It was not the show part of the garden ; she had no reason to dread interruption ; and she collected her strength, determined to take her place presently among the company, and knelt down at the edge of the water and dipped her handkerchief in it, to apply it to her eyes. After doing so, as she raised her head she perceived Charlton advancing towards her ; the only person whom she could then see without annoyance. But his quick sympathy suggested that she wished for solitude, and he said—

‘ Miss Somers, if my presence is unwelcome to you,

‘speak to me (as it is your nature to speak) frankly, and say, Leave me alone.’

‘I will speak frankly; I could not do otherwise to you; and I say, Mr. Charlton, pray stay with me for a few minutes.’

While Edith spoke she offered him her hand, which he pressed for a moment cordially in his own. As he relinquished it again he said, with that tone of earnestness and tenderness that gave a value to every word he spoke—

‘I have observed this morning, not only since poor Mr. Vernon’s unlucky accident, but before, that you have appeared feverish—disturbed. If there should be any cause but indisposition; if there should have arisen any circumstance—as I almost hope, from your asking me to remain here for a few minutes—in which friendship can serve you, I trust you will feel that you have in me and in my wife very warm friends.’

Edith paused for a moment, watching silently the expression of a countenance that was both a faithful and a delicate indicator of the feelings of its owner. It was well that he was a man who never had the wish to conceal his thoughts, for his face would have been a traitor to his wish. After this silent look she took courage and spoke.

‘Mr. Charlton, I will tell you the truth. I am unhappy, I am very unhappy this morning. I have received a letter from my father which places me in

a cruel position. He writes to me that he has let his house in town—that he does not wish for my presence at Paris—that I must contrive to stay on with my friends. This is most unkind. He does not mean it. I am sure he does not mean to distress me, but indeed he does distress me very much. Oh! how unhappy it is for a woman to have no mother. A mother would not—even a foolish mother would not expose her daughter to such a chance. My father leaves me so carelessly, so unconcernedly, that I really have no more protection, no more guardianship, than if I were an unregarded orphan.'

Edith spoke with strong emotion; but though her voice was shaken by it, she did not allow any tears to escape her.

'It is, then,' said Charlton, 'your father's neglect that grieves you so much. It is the consciousness of his indifference that pains you. If only this, I can merely say, try to bear it; but if owing to that neglect you suffer from any other troubles—if you can tell them to me—'

'I can, I will. This is the case: I feel that I must go away from Elderslie. Pray do not ask me why. I know that I ought—I know that I must; and yet what excuse can I offer for my departure? Only yesterday I had made up my mind to say that I was going to town—that I expected a friend to stay with me. But now what can I say? I hardly

know what to do. I only feel that I must go. I feel it strongly: it is a duty—it is a wish—it is a necessity.’

‘I have no doubt that you are right,’ said Charlton; ‘I feel that you must be right, and I will not ask your reasons. I have no claim, no desire to ask anything but this: will you come to us? You know that Emilia will be as glad as I am at the prospect of securing the delight of your society; as sorry as I am that we shall owe this privilege to an occurrence that gives you pain.’

‘I accept your invitation,’ cried Edith with a burst of joy. ‘I know it is sincere—I know all you say is true. I thank you—I cannot tell you how much I thank you.’

‘But can you,’ said Charlton, ‘make up your mind to depart from Elderslie so soon as to-morrow? for such is our intention. I confess that I long for my return as a schoolboy longs for home. This company, this parade, is irksome to us both. Our home, Miss Somers, is peaceful, but it does not offer much variety—it does not offer the amusements of society.’

‘Oh! Mr. Charlton, you cannot doubt the happiness with which I should at any time look forward to being an inmate of your home. You know, you have long known—my esteem for you; an esteem that began before I personally knew you, and that has been only increased by more intimate know-

ledge. It is hardly worthy of you to seem to doubt it; but you cannot—you certainly cannot—know the inexpressible relief I feel in the prospect of leaving Elderslie.'

'I can well understand it,' said Charlton; and they again shook hands.

And now they were joined by Lord Hanworth.

Edith, with the secret consciousness that she was engaged at that very moment in a plot the object of which was to escape his presence, changed colour as he approached. He looked at her, and his own face was for a moment flushed.

Charlton was annoyed at the interruption, and he discerned that it was unwelcome to Edith. This feeling prompted him to say—

'Why are you here, Hanworth? How is it that you have left the field?'

He spoke with an irritation of manner, but Lord Hanworth's was unruffled as he replied—

'I must answer your question by another. Why are you here? for that was what I was sent to ask, and that is why I am here. Vernon has been inquiring after Miss Somers. Mrs. Charlton has been asking for you. Lady Allerton announced that she knew you were both together, and she believed you were in the walled garden. I undertook to ascertain the fact; and I have found that Lady Allerton is right in this case, as I conclude she is in most cases.'

He glanced at Edith as he spoke. He knew that

she and Charlton both cordially disliked Lady Allerton, and he wanted to see how they would receive his praise of her. Charlton was a man who never left his friends to doubt his sentiments on any subject; and he said, with strong emphasis, 'Lady Allerton is a hateful woman.'

'It is often hateful to be right,' said Hanworth.

'I am going home now,' said Edith. 'I do not intend to shoot any more.'

'Do you intend to relinquish your chance of the prize?' said Hanworth. 'Reflect that Miss Allerton will get it if you do not, and that will distress Charlton.'

'I shall be very glad to see Miss Allerton win the prize,' said Edith, slightly offended. 'Her energy deserves it, and she is really a much better shot than myself; and even if I did look upon her with that spirit of rivalry and jealousy which men believe, or affect to believe, that women cherish towards each other, the effort of shooting now would cost me more than any degree of triumph would pay.'

'I am afraid you are ill, then,' said Hanworth, and there was a real concern in his tone.

'No,' replied Edith, not willing to excite his interest. 'I am not in the least ill, but I am tired of shooting and tired of company.'

'Charlton,' said Hanworth, taking him by the arm, 'Miss Somers is tired of our company. Come away.'

'Come away, indeed!' cried Lady Allerton, just then entering the walled garden. 'I am come to call you. There are the scores being added up, and unless the arithmetic is very slowly performed, the best shots will be named before we reach the ground.'

'I am indifferent on the subject,' said Charlton; 'I would rather walk home with Miss Somers.'

'Pray do not,' said Edith; 'your absence might cause mine to be observed upon, and I wish to avoid all comments. Mr. Vernon might think I was ill.'

'We are wasting time,' said Lady Allerton; 'I really must carry you away.' And putting her arm through Hanworth's she led him out of the garden. Charlton slowly followed, and Edith took the homeward path alone.

As soon as the party reached the shooting ground they were joined by Mrs. Ramsay, who told them that the hobbdehoy was 'fanned with conquest's crimson wing,' and 'mocked the air with idle state.' Lady Allerton was indignant; truly angry. Adeline was indeed mistress of the bracelet, but her victory, so shared, was worth nothing, and she was too much provoked to forbear from doing some mischief; so she took Mrs. Ramsay aside, and whispered to her one or two suspicions that had entered her mind concerning Edith. She began by mildly wondering at her kindness in having her so much with her, with only a sly hint at a possible rivalry with Margaret; but Mrs. Ramsay's stolid opposition, her

serene satisfaction in Margaret's superior beauty and fortune, and the contempt with which she met these insinuations, provoked her to a more vigorous attack, and finally she plainly told her that she believed Edith had sought to attract Lord Hanworth, and that she was certain she had succeeded. Mrs. Ramsay laughed uncomfortably, and played with her gold chain nervously while Lady Allerton spoke, but at the end merely observed, that this was 'such stuff as dreams were made of,' and walked away and joined Lord Hanworth, beckoning Margaret to her side.

Meanwhile Charlton drew his wife away from the ground, where young Silverston was receiving his congratulations, and wishing that he had not earned them, on account of the difficulties that presented themselves in the attempt to make proper acknowledgments, and led her into a remote shrubbery, there to discuss at ease the recent interview with Edith Somers. Mrs. Charlton was, as her husband knew she would be, delighted that Edith was to be their guest; gratified, in the first place, because she was really fond of her, and in the next, because it was pleasant to her feminine nature to have a little mystery to penetrate, and a love story to help to an end. It was exactly what she had expected. She was not in the least surprised. Hanworth had not been straightforward enough; he had no right to keep her so long in doubt—it was time to explain

himself. She could not doubt that Edith returned his affection, but she admired the delicacy that made her withdraw herself from an undeclared attachment. Lord Hanworth had had sufficient opportunity; he ought to have spoken; and it was as well that he should learn by her speedy withdrawal that it was not always pleasant to wait. His tardiness in action, that really was the only fault in his admirable character. His habit of weighing, reasoning, considering, on all subjects, left him too constantly in a state of balance; but love would overcome habit, and Edith was assuredly taking the best means in every way to secure her own peace of mind.

‘Was it certain,’ Charlton ventured to ask, though in such matters he was deferential to his wife, ‘that Edith really did return Hanworth’s affection?’

Mrs. Charlton was astonished at the question. There could not be the shadow of a doubt on that subject; she thought that she had none before, but now she confessed she was conscious of an increased certainty, and indeed, strengthening her own observations, she had not failed to perceive Margaret Ramsay’s friendly and tender sympathy on the subject. She had remarked how she silently watched Edith, and how anxiously she was thinking about her all day, while she delicately refrained from saying anything that could in any way compromise her. She approved the course Edith was adopting, and

she felt sure of a happy termination. Charlton suggested that there should be nothing said to any one on the subject; careless talk had sometimes created grave troubles in matters of this kind; Mrs. Charlton quite agreed with him, but now she must say no more, she must hasten in to assure Edith how much she rejoiced in this new plan; and then Mrs. Charlton left the shrubbery, pleased with her confidential talk with her husband, and still more pleased with her own unfailing penetration.

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CHAPTER XI.

WHEN Margaret and Edith retired for the night, instead of talking as usual over all the small events of the day, and reproducing its scenes and dialogues, each sat for a while in grave silence. Edith was winding herself up for a great duty which she had resolved to perform. Margaret was considering how many disappointments may be experienced in the space of twelve hours, and deciding that not one hour in that day had passed without bringing some sense of disappointment to her, and she felt tired and depressed. She did not seek sympathy, and almost for the first time in her life she did not feel disposed to address Edith. Edith looked at her attentively for some time before she spoke, and then said—

‘Margaret, I am going to leave you to-morrow.’

‘Leave us to-morrow! how? why? What do you mean?’

‘The Charltons have invited me to stay with them at Calverwells, and I have accepted their invitation. I shall like it very much.’

‘Do you mean that you should like to leave me very much?’

‘No; but that I shall like to be with them very much.’

‘Oh! of course, novelty in friendship is always pleasant.’

‘You mean that as a reproach, Margaret, but I do not deserve it. The Charltons are no new friends. I have admired and esteemed Mr. Charlton through his works ever since I have been able to understand what admiration and esteem meant, and with such a feeling to begin an acquaintance, it is not surprising if it passes into friendship without long delays and doubts. I am indeed not fond of doubting and delaying, and on that subject before I go away I must speak to you. Tell me—do tell me—what Lord Hanworth is doing.’

‘He is doing right, I have no doubt,’ said Margaret, stiffly.

‘But I have a doubt, Margaret. Why so much delay? Why, when he has had so much opportunity to say what he feels towards you, has he left it unsaid?’

‘That is a question, Edith, that you have no right to ask me. I am satisfied. I differ from you if you think that he has had so much opportunity to speak. I am in no hurry that he should speak. He will say what is right at the right time.’

‘I never,’ cried Edith, ‘saw so determined a confidence, and I only hope it may be rewarded.’

‘Hope it may be rewarded! By your tone you mean that you think it will be punished; but in this matter I must think for myself.’

‘I have no more to say,’ replied Edith, and she bent down over a box of books that she was packing.

‘But I have more to say,’ said Margaret, ‘and I must say it. I have to say what may surprise you, what I think must surprise you, what I am sure must surprise you: Lady Allerton has told mamma, and has insinuated to me, that you have been seeking to attract Lord Hanworth.’

‘I cannot be surprised that Lady Allerton should say anything that is false,’ Edith answered, passionately. ‘Margaret, you know that it is false.’

‘Yes, I believe it is; but I wish you had not mentioned Lord Hanworth to-night.’ The subject was then dropped, and they went to bed: but Edith in vain endeavoured to sleep. Recollections that she wished to exclude would press upon her, and when she resolutely shut her eyes, faces were still present to her sight that she wished not to see. Lord Hanworth’s and Lady Allerton’s changed strangely one into the other, and Lady Allerton’s only disappeared by the increasing proportions of Hanworth’s. This was too uncomfortable to be endured long, and Edith presently rose, wrapped herself in her dressing-gown and as noiselessly as she could, opened a chink of the shutter to admit the moonlight into her room. She then moved gently to the side of Margaret’s bed. Margaret was sleeping, but not with a quiet sleep; perhaps the opening of the shutter had disturbed her. Edith leant down close over her, and

fancied her breathing quick; as she bent towards her she touched her cheek, and thought she felt a tear upon it. Margaret stirred at this touch, and Edith, fearing to wake her, drew a little aside, and then knelt down by the bed. But Margaret sighed, woke, turned, and saw her. 'Who is that?' said she; 'is it Edith?'

'Yes; I hope I have not waked you. I came to look at you asleep. I shall not be with you to-morrow: you did not say good night to me as usual, and I cannot sleep.'

'Dear Edith, good night; go and sleep.'

'Have I done anything that you dislike, Margaret? do you feel as if you disliked me? I feared you did, and the fear has kept me awake.'

'No, Edith. I have been vexed to-day, and I did not like all you said, but I love you; indeed, I love and trust you. Kiss me, and do not lie awake.'

Edith kissed her, and left her again to seek repose, and she presently fell into a deep sleep, from which she was waked only by the sound of the breakfast gong. She rang hurriedly for Morris: was that really the breakfast gong? What would Sir Simon say? Why had she not been waked? Miss Ramsay had desired that she should not be disturbed. Miss Ramsay had just gone into the breakfast room. Edith begged that a message might be taken to Lady Howell, that she was not to expect her till after breakfast. She felt for the discomfort that

this departure from regularity would inflict upon Sir Simon, but she was glad herself to escape from the talking over of the archery, and the day which had brought her so much vexation, and from another meeting with Hanworth.

It was much better to breakfast alone, and it was a comfort, when a knock at her door was heard, to find that it came from gentle Mrs. Charlton's hand. Mrs. Charlton only came to say that they were to start for Calverwells in an hour's time, and to offer to assist her in any final arrangements; and she discreetly went away when Edith assured her that she was quite ready, and would soon come down. When the actual time of departure arrived, the leave-taking was not so bad as she expected. Sir Simon talked indeed at some length about hoping to see her again, and about her claim upon his gratitude as a father, but she did not feel herself bound to listen to every word, and it was evident that the general intention of his speech was kind. Lady Howell kissed her with something that approached to affection. Adeline and Captain French wondered that she could tear herself away from the charms of Elderslie. Lady Allerton contented herself with a stiff curtsy. Sir George hoped that she had breakfasted well. There was enough of tenderness in Margaret's parting, and there seemed to be no more meaning than usual in Mrs. Ramsay's quotation when she said 'Go where glory waits thee.' Lord Hanworth

was present, but Vernon stood in front of him ; and it was only as the carriage was actually starting that he extended his hand and said good bye.

It was with a feeling of inexpressible relief that Edith looked out upon the open road when she found herself altogether clear of the grounds of Elderslie, with none of its associations hanging about her, for her friendship with the Charltons did not belong to those associations. She felt herself entering upon a new and better life ; and the well-known opening passage of Dante's ' Purgatory ' recurred over and over again to her mind :

Per correr miglior acqua, alza le vele
Omai la navicella del mio ingegno ;

though she did not surrender herself habitually to fragments of poetry, in the manner of Mrs. Ramsay. To figure to herself a quiet home with true friendship, an absence from ostentation, from the fatiguing effort of a constant flow of talk, and from a pressing anxiety, was an employment so happy that she was pained by its interruption in the arrival at Calverwells, though that arrival brought her to the very home she was looking forward to. The air of the house into which Charlton led her was tranquil and pleasing ; and a fair-haired, blue-eyed, pretty laughing boy of five years old came to meet them with that joyful and caressing warmth that is not denied even by English custom to the manners of

children. Charlton pressed him in his arms with the same fondness as his mother, and the child seemed to Edith to contrast favourably with the child at Elderslie. Charlton led her to his study, and called upon her to admire a beautiful view from the garden ; but Mrs. Charlton suggested that as she had passed an uneasy night, Edith had best retire to the quiet of her own room, a counsel which she was glad to follow, and then the married pair were left to discuss her condition, sending the child into the garden in order to do it freely and comfortably. She was evidently, Mrs. Charlton said, in a state of painful doubt, but it would soon be over : Hanworth would certainly act as he should. Charlton was quite sure that Hanworth was very much in love, but he judged from some passages between them in the walled garden that there had been an actual quarrel ; that might have prevented him from acknowledging his sentiments, or he might have been prevented by Lady Allerton's continual pursuit of him. But he owned that he was surprised at Edith's accession of spirits in leaving Elderslie. Mrs. Charlton, on the contrary, quite understood, quite sympathized with it ; it was an exultation at having found a test for Lord Hanworth's real feelings. Here little Willy burst in with a lamentation that he had broken his drum, and by that important event the dialogue was suspended.

When Edith appeared at the dinner table it was

not with swollen eyes or tear-stained cheeks, but with a fresh colour, and a bright smile, and Charlton thought that if she really were in love no one had ever borne love so well. She was not listless, she was not absent; on the contrary, she was ready to join in conversation, and to make her share of it, and to take an interest in every topic that arose. This was her first visit to Calverwells, and she asked all the proper questions concerning it—was not the surrounding country beautiful? had it not been once a very fashionable watering place? was it so still? what was its society like? To this Mrs. Charlton replied that the country was lovely, that the waters were considered beneficial to invalids, and that no doubt there must be a great deal to like in the residents when well known. ‘I am sorry,’ said Charlton, ‘to differ from Emilia, but I believe the waters to have no effect except on the imagination; and I feel quite sure that we should find very little to like in the residents if we knew them well, for which reason I keep aloof, and know them hardly at all. As for the charms of the country, even Emilia’s romance cannot exaggerate those; whenever we wander away from our own place it is to find some charming walk or some pleasant ride; and yet when we come back to our home, we feel that it was impossible to see anything prettier in our absence from it. Then you must know that within reach of this fortunate spot are some of the most interesting places in England.

There is a wonderful old house which has survived all the perils of dilapidation, of civil war, of fire, of extravagant owners, and of modern so-called improvement and restoration. Standing within its stately walled gardens, in the midst of a glorious deer-park, full of the finest beech trees in the country, it lives as the noblest specimen extant of a mansion of the olden time. Each generation of its proprietors for centuries past has left its own deposit of treasures, and the house with its collections may be regarded, to borrow a term from geology, as a fine section, displaying in the most perfect manner the fossils of successive formations. You may pace the gallery in which Henry VIII. has danced, with its appropriate Holbeins on the walls. You may speculate whether you could sleep comfortably in the state bedchamber, with its silver furniture, fitted up for James I., and you may lament the decline of taste in the apartments furnished for the reception of Dutch William, and in those prepared for a possible visit from George III. Vandykes, Lelys, Knellers, Sir Joshuas, and Lawrences in magnificent profusion continue the chain of family portraits through all these periods; and in passing through the various suites of rooms in this remarkable house, you seem to be making an historical progress, and to be living one after the other through all the years of its existence.'

'Oh,' cried Edith, 'how much I should like to

do that ; and yet I feel almost that I have done it from your description.'

' We must take you to see it,' said Charlton; ' and we must take you too to another smaller sample of an ancient country house, to which the burly monarch of many wives resorted to court one of them, and which is so closely associated with the recollections of her happy youth and cruel fate. The old rooms remain much as they were when Henry and Anne exchanged posies in them. The spiked portcullis still hangs above the doorway, and the wet moat still surrounds the melancholy pile of building. Then, there are the classic shades, and the ancestral halls so intimately associated with the memories of England's most accomplished cavalier, and of all that fine taste, that gallant spirit, and that noble nature which were so untimely quenched at Zutphen. To see these places we must take you expeditions beyond Calverwells.'

' But,' interrupted Mrs. Charlton, ' it will not give you the trouble of an expedition to see our beautiful heath, of which I am never tired, and to-morrow I mean to show you the old-fashioned parade, with its rows of little shops, and to introduce you to Beau's library, where you may see some of the loungers of the place looking out at the window to see other people drink the waters of the mineral spring to which, however out of fashion it may be, Calverwells owes its existence.'

‘ Most people,’ said Charlton, ‘ take the waters in this vicarious method, and it is a good way of doing it, as when so done no harm can come of it ; and when you are sated with this exhilarating sight you may look from the opposite window, and you will probably be gratified by seeing a troop of pretty riders cantering by, escorted by the zealous Mr. Norval, the best riding-master anywhere, or by one of his charming daughters, whom it is a pleasure to see managing a high-mettled animal : or perhaps a young Norval will pass with a little squadron of boy cavalry in training, and my Willy amongst them. I have seen stout old gentlemen staring out with longing looks at these scenes, thinking of the days when the half-joy and half-fear (terrible delights) of early equestrianism were known to them too, and wishing for their own ponies again.’

Edith went to bed wishing for the morning that was to reveal some of these things to her.

CHAPTER XII.

A VERY beautiful morning it was when it came, clear and serene, with a warm but not oppressive air. Edith felt as she accompanied her friends and their pretty boy across the common that Mrs. Charlton had hardly said enough of the beauty of these home scenes, and she felt an indescribable assurance of peace within her as she leant on Charlton's arm. She was certain that she had in him a friend on whose indulgence, generosity, and constancy she might always surely depend ; and while his wife talked with her there was the charm of feminine sympathy and warmth. The child too was full of pleasant ways and lively fancies ; and when they all sat down under the shade of two dark pines, and looked out upon the bright sky and the sparkling landscape beyond, it seemed desirable to stay for ever in this seat. But presently a group of young children and nursemaids approached them, and eyed the bench so yearningly that it appeared right to move away, and accordingly the Charltons rose, and they then walked down to survey the promised glories of the parade, where the band was just beginning to play a waltz, which made it difficult to walk except in waltz measure. The

parade was soon sufficiently enjoyed, and when Charlton had satisfied himself through the medium of the *Times*, the *Chronicle*, and the *Morning Post*, that there was nothing new to learn, Edith and her friends left the region of small shop-fronts to enjoy again the freshness of the common.

‘And now,’ said Edith, addressing Charlton, ‘I want to know on what you found your notion of a necessary dislike to the residents of this attractive place. The few that I saw at the well and in the library had a steady, respectable look, grave and quiet.’

‘They are, I believe,’ said Charlton, ‘a so-called pious community, and they have put down the play-house, and have built up chapels, but from what I hear, not to the improvement of their morals. I believe that Dr. Watts has preached in vain, as far as this little world is concerned, that our hands were not made to tear each other’s eyes; or if the sentiment has answered any purpose, it has suggested the advantage of an attack upon the back instead of the face, and Pope’s line,

At every word a reputation dies,

might be posted up on the parade as an indication of what was to be expected by any one entering into this society.’

‘I do not believe, though,’ said Mrs. Charlton, ‘that it is really at all worse than other watering-

places ; and my dear William, in his hatred, his just hatred, of the malevolence of busy tongues, perhaps exaggerates the state of things here.'

'Look,' said Charlton, 'in the index to Johnson's *Idler* for the word *watering-place*, and it will lead you to this passage :—"The numbers are too great for privacy, and too small for diversion. As each is known to be a spy upon the rest, they all live in continual restraint, and having but a narrow range for censure, they gratify its cravings by preying upon one another."'

'That is very like Johnson,' said Edith ; 'and when I say that it is like Johnson, I mean to say that it is very good ; for I am so untrue to the taste of the day that I find myself reading old papers in the *Idler* and *Rambler* instead of new ones in fashionable magazines ; and I find thoughts and images to dwell upon and to admire in those worn-out volumes. Sometimes I confess that even the style impresses itself upon me as weighty and grand.'

'It is too grand and too weighty,' said Charlton, 'except in certain passages where it has weighty sentiments to carry ; but I agree with you in a very high esteem for the old doctor as a writer, and in feeling that he is underrated now, perhaps because he was overrated long ago, and because that swelling style that was only made tolerable by the strength of his hand, became intolerable when it was built up by feeble imitators.'

‘I must own,’ said Mrs. Charlton, ‘that I look suspiciously at critics who talk of Dr. Johnson as commonplace, thinking that they perhaps may find it convenient that he should be laid aside by the reading public in order to be securely and comfortably plundered by themselves. I have read images and similes of his reproduced over and over again till I am sick of them.’

What more might have been settled about Dr. Johnson, had the conversation continued, cannot be known, for children are not favourable to literary discussions, and Willy now ardently besought his father to help him to fly his kite. Charlton, however meritorious as a poet, was still more excellent as a father, and instantly abandoned his argument to assist his boy. Edith and Mrs. Charlton of course directed all their interest at once to this pursuit also, and the kite, between failures and successes, unlooked-for abasements and unhopèd-for flights, filled up the remaining portion of time until the luncheon hour. How happily, how quickly the morning had passed, Edith thought, as she entered the dining-room. How much she hoped that Margaret was finding an equal happiness; but could it be found at Elderslie? Then the old wonderment about Hanworth recurred to her again. Did he really love Margaret? would he really now seek out some quiet moment to reveal the sentiments that were imputed to him? But why should she think

of Hanworth? why should she cloud her present enjoyment by unpleasant recollections?

Just as she reached this passage in her thoughts, Charlton addressed her, and she started. His wife exchanged a look with him, which Edith of course saw, though she was of course meant not to see it; and then Mrs. Charlton said—

‘Never mind, Edith. Day-dreams are allowed to young ladies. We will not ask what you were thinking of.’

Edith blushed very deeply, and Willy said—

‘How red Miss Somers’ face is with running after my kite!’

His father tapped his cheek with a benevolent smile at his innocence; and Edith began an animated discourse upon the kite, to show her unconcern.

After luncheon, during the heat of the day, there was some sitting in the garden under shade, while Charlton read aloud from a favourite poet; and after dinner came a delightful stroll upon the heath, which seemed full of a new kind of beauty, while the red flush of the sunset was dying away, and the moon with her white light was beginning to show herself. They lingered watching till the stars came out, and the town grew dim and undefined, only its lights indicating its extent, and under this aspect giving a notion of vastness and importance far beyond what it showed in daylight. Noticing these things, idly strolling, pleasantly talking, in perfect sympathy and

perfect content, they remained out of doors till Mrs. Charlton feared the servants might be looking for them about tea ; and then they went home ; and when Edith wished them good-night, she told her friends with sincerity that this was one of the happiest days she had ever passed.

The morning's post brought a letter from Margaret to Edith, which ran as follows :—

‘ MY DEAREST EDITH,—I really must write to you, for I think of you continually, and I hope you will feel interested in the progress of the life at Elderslie since the time of your departure ; but I have little time, and I am writing in dread of the gong, yet with much to say. In the evening after you left us that strange little man, Mr. Vernon, came and sat himself down close to me, and, pointing my attention to Lord Hanworth and Lady Allerton, who just then appeared engaged in earnest conversation, he said, “That I call a case of a real flirtation.” I laughed, though I own I felt vexed, and I asked, “How do you define the word ‘flirtation?’ ”—“Oh, I hate definitions, but look, and you will understand the example before you—each party seeking to excite an interest in the other without any sentiment to justify the effort, or, as the saying is, without any love lost. This grave Lord Hanworth is my notion of a male coquette, for he absorbs the women’s attention by appearing indifferent to it. Yet if by

any chance one of them fails to worship him, he will spare no art to bring her to his feet; and Lady Allerton perfectly understands the game. Last night I saw her turn the cold shoulder on him for some slight on his part, and this morning I was the envious witness of his tender assiduities towards her at the breakfast-table. The honey, the marmalade, the favourite rolls, were all put with such a graceful courtesy close within her reach that, much as I love her, there was no chance left of any little service for me. And she was melted! She rewarded my rival with such a look! Yes; he has made her more than half in love with him, and I am a wretched man with only you left to be kind to me now that Edith Somers is gone." "But," said I, "I cannot be kind if I hear you speak ill of your friends, and I really cannot allow you to call Lord Hanworth a male coquette." "Can you disprove the truth of what I have advanced?" he replied. "Yes; what you have called coquetry I recognise as benevolence. Lord Hanworth saw that he had offended unintentionally, and he was not too proud to show himself sorry for it." "Ah, there we split. My point is, that the offence he gave was not unintentional. That is his art with women; he stings them into tenderness." I was really annoyed. There was no semblance of truth in these biting observations, yet I liked them so little that, in order to avoid any more of them, I broke away from Mr. Vernon and seated

myself by Sir Simon, while *your Valentine* entered upon his usual occupation—a hunt for his eye-glass; and soon we heard one of his piercing exclamations of lament: “O Hanworth, Hanworth, I beg your pardon. I thought this was my blotting-book, left about in my careless way, and now I see it is yours; and in looking for my eye-glass—I fancied it might have slipped into the pocket—I have tumbled everything out.” Lord Hanworth, I thought with a disturbed look, went to the table, where his papers and letters were all blowing about opposite the open window; while Mr. Vernon, according to his wont, did damage in trying to help. As Lord Hanworth was putting the rest in order, one stray leaf, taken by the wind, went fluttering about the room, poor Mr. Vernon fluttering after it. He caught it at last, and then came a cry of triumph. “Here is a discovery—here is a discovery. Why, Miss Ramsay, here is your charming drawing of Miss Somers’ rescue of Simon Percy at Cowlington Priory! How could it have got into that book? Did you mistake it for one of your letters, Hanworth?—do you share my aristocratic privilege of blindness? You must take to glasses—you must take to glasses.” Lord Hanworth stood with his back turned while this sentence was addressed to him, put up his papers, and made no answer, and Mr. Vernon brought the drawing to me. I put it quietly away, hoping that the subject would now be dropped; but Sir Simon

came forward, and asked to look at it, and gave out some pompous criticisms ; while my sister began to rally Lord Hanworth upon what she pretended to suppose was his unconscious theft. He bore it patiently, and made no effort at any sallies in return, and presently walked out, with some observation on the beauty of the evening. I sat still. I felt that he wished me to join him on the terrace, but I had not the courage to do it, and he would have strolled alone, but that Adeline and Captain French were seized with a desire to stroll also, and Adeline drew me out with her. Lord Hanworth soon joined us, and our other friends were willing enough, as you may readily suppose, to leave us an opportunity for a few words alone. So it presently happened that they took the lower terrace, while we occupied the upper ; and then Lord Hanworth addressed me in a low tone, and I only feared lest he should too plainly see my emotion. He said (I can while I write hear the exact tone in which every syllable was spoken), " Miss Ramsay, I feel that I owe you an apology. I must ask you to forgive the theft of this beautiful drawing of yours, which I cannot justify. I cannot wish to disguise from you the feelings that influenced me when I took this unallowed possession of it. Indeed, I have intended to speak of them to you before, but it has been impossible. I have wished to ask you if——" At this moment (Edith, feel for me) Lady Allerton came brushing up against us, and

I ceased to hear his voice. I had averted my face from him, so that I could not see him when he first began to address me, and I had not felt courage to look round at him. I cannot tell you what Lady Allerton said—I can only tell that she interrupted what I most wished to listen to, and that she had the impertinence to send Lord Hanworth away in quest of Adeline. She was then quite ready to enter upon a cross-examination of me, but I left her at once, and retired to my own room, not choosing that she or any one else should perceive my agitation. Why is she not so sensible of the dangers of Captain French's attentions as to leave Elderslie altogether? When will Lord Hanworth find a moment to finish what he had begun to say? It happens most unfortunately that he is summoned quite suddenly to town this morning—but why should I complain? Has he not said enough, and may I not now think of him as I wish? We are friends, Edith; you have spoken frankly to me, and I well know that you deserve all my confidence, and so let me confess to you that there have been in my intercourse with him thoughts of doubt too distressing, too grievous to reveal at the time even to you, but in my present happiness I may open my whole heart to you, and claim that sympathy which is the truest satisfaction of friendship. I have repeated all exactly as it happened to my beloved mother, from whom you know I have no feeling, no thought concealed, and she is

delighted ; and only afraid that my shyness may have been misconstrued, as Lord Hanworth sat silent and grave for the rest of the evening.

‘ Sir Simon invites me to accompany him to see his last new fence, which is of course the best fence in the United Kingdom. Good-bye.

Your always affectionate

MARGARET RAMSAY.

‘ Of course you will keep this entirely to yourself.’

This letter raised Edith’s present happiness to its height. She read it three times over, and then, feeling that there could be no longer any doubt of Hanworth’s sentiments, though Vernon’s description of him as a male coquette occurred to her as not so devoid of all semblance of truth as it appeared to Margaret, she re-folded it, and laid it in her writing-case, promising herself, with a relieved heart, to answer it that very day. All her previous fears she regarded as unfounded, as even foolish. She had allowed herself to be influenced by Lady Allerton’s suggestions ; she had misconstrued Lord Hanworth’s regard for her as Margaret’s dearest friend ; and it had been nothing more than a bad dream.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE next day Edith and Charlton were to take a walk of some distance, and Mrs. Charlton was to pay visits that required returning, and some of which she almost hoped might be returned so effectually as never to come upon her hands again. So she had to go and lose a fine day and a pleasant walk, and find her chief happiness in learning that most of the people for whom she was making this sacrifice were not at home, and of emptying her card-case at their doors. When will the polite world agree to adopt some more convenient mode of interchanging civilities than this one of morning visits and leaving cards? Why cannot the principle of the clearing-house be adopted—the place to which all the City bankers send their clerks to exchange cheques, leaving only a small balance to pass in the shape of actual money? Why should not the servants meet and exchange cards, and balance the accounts of mutual civility in the same way? However, as this expeditious and sensible method of transacting the visiting business of life has not yet been established even in London, it was not likely that Calverwells should have anticipated the metropolis in so brilliant

a scheme; and Mrs. Charlton was no worse off than her neighbours when she parted from Edith and her husband, she in bonnet and silk dress of best for her calls, while Edith rejoiced in the sylvan freedom of that wide straw hat which makes so many pretty faces look still prettier.

The walkers walked for a little way in silence, each seeming to enjoy the beauty of the day and the elastic tread of the turf under their feet. At last Charlton said—

‘This is one of those finely constituted days when, for the time at least, mere existence and the exercise of volition in producing movement appear to be enough for happiness. What a glorious sky it is overhead, and what a springing carpet of green beneath us!’

‘Yes, I feel that too,’ answered Edith; ‘and altogether I am very happy—happier indeed than I thought I should ever be again, a few days ago.’

Charlton smiled, though he was puzzled, but only said,

‘I shall ask no questions; but I hope the time is not far distant when we may be admitted to share your happiness. We were afraid that all was not so well as what you have just said makes me now hope it is.’

‘All is well now,’ said Edith; ‘but I would rather talk about something else. Indeed I feel I have been indiscreet even in letting you know I was

happy; that is, otherwise happy than you know I must be in taking such a walk, with you as my companion, on such a day as this.'

Charlton was still perplexed, but could say no more to procure further enlightenment. He stopped a moment, and looking back at the town, remarked, 'How well that spire shows among trees: there is nothing to be seen from this point which could suggest its being in a town.'

'Is that the High Church spire or the Low Church spire?' asked Edith.

'I rather think it is neither—it is the Middling Church spire, if one may invent a name for it; but I do very much dislike these names, although it is perhaps impossible to speak intelligibly and shortly without using them, and I believe they are not repudiated by those to whom they are applied.'

'It is a convenience when party names mean nothing in themselves, I daresay,' said Edith; 'but I remember being very much disappointed when I was a little girl, and reading the History of England, to find such an unsatisfactory explanation of the meaning and origin of the words Whig and Tory.'

'Certainly,' replied Charlton, 'those well-known party designations were unmeaning enough in their origin, as unmeaning indeed as they have now come to be in their accepted political sense. It was the same also, you may recollect, with those names of far greater interest and of far longer endurance in

the general politics of Europe—I mean Guelph and Ghibeline—the very sources of which have perplexed the most learned authors.’

‘ I suppose,’ said Edith, ‘ people are glad to shelter themselves under a name which really implies nothing but the fact of siding with a recognised party. One of the gardeners at Elderslie the other day was telling Mr. Vernon that he always voted “blue,” and his father had always voted “blue” before him; and Mr. Vernon could not extract any further confession of political faith from him, although, knowing perfectly well what “blue” meant, he suggested a suitable creed for his acceptance. But the gardener stuck to his “blue,” and would not commit himself to anything else.’

‘ Well,’ said Charlton, ‘ I wish one could be as easily satisfied as the gardener. I fear I can neither call myself “blue” nor “red,” nor accept any cut-and-dried creed in politics which either Mr. Vernon or Mr. Vernon’s antagonists could propound to me. I might find something to agree with in both sets of opinions, but I could not assent altogether to either. I sometimes envy my brother’s convictions, of whom you may have heard me talk as a thorough Tory. He went out young to India, and has religiously preserved his early faith, or what he cherishes as his early faith, as a part of his home feelings. Dear Edmund, he is a true-hearted fellow as ever breathed,

and in spite of our different views our meeting will be a very happy one.'

The mention of Edmund Charlton had an especial interest for Edith, for he was the intimate friend of Charles Stirling. In India they had been thrown a good deal together, their tastes and habits suited each other, and they were drawn still closer by the ties of early associations. She longed to ask something about him, but feared the tremor of her voice. She did not wish to betray any emotion in hearing Mr. Stirling spoken of, and she therefore paused for some time before she said anything, and then asked calmly, 'When did you last hear from Major Charlton, and when will your meeting take place?'

'I heard from him yesterday,' said Charlton, 'and I may hope to see him in a fortnight. He and his friend Stirling will come home together. I trust you will see this meeting and know my brother. Stirling, I believe, you know already, for Edmund says he has heard him speak of you.'

Charlton was wholly unconscious when he spoke this sentence of its being at all likely to excite emotion in his companion, so little do the most intimate friends sometimes know of each other's deepest feelings; but Edith was much moved, and recollections and conjectures became crowded in her mind. He had not, then, forgotten her. He had talked of her. What had he said? Why had not

Major Charlton had the humanity to say in what terms his friend had spoken of her ? but perhaps he had said, and Charlton could tell her, if she could find courage to ask ; but then she reproached herself for her folly ; they could not and they ought not to know that Charles Stirling's opinion could be a matter of any solicitude to her, and she must remain silent, and look forward to a meeting which she thought of with an almost equal degree of pleasure and of pain.

‘ I am afraid,’ said Charlton, struck by her long silence, ‘ that your walk has tired you.’

‘ No ; yes ; perhaps it has a little. But we are very near home—and see ! there is Mrs. Charlton, with little Willy, coming to meet us.’

As she spoke Mrs. Charlton joined them. She was looking bright and cheerful. The burden of her visits was cast off, and she had a few new impressions gleaned from them to communicate. She had really discovered that her dear William's views of the society were correct. She had been shocked to hear neighbours speak so ill of each other ; and she was particularly distressed (but she was distressed with a very cheerful voice and face) to find religion, which ought to unite all Christian hearts, dividing them with bitterness and acrimony of spirit ; and the same pastor that was the idol of one being talked of as the arch-enemy by the other. It seemed, indeed, that there were feuds upon every

possible subject : feuds about doctors, feuds about riding-masters, feuds about tradesmen, feuds about cards—a constant warfare going on. When she had spoken of the beauty of the country, trusting in that to find a peaceful topic, the only idea the subject suggested to the residents was, that some one was building on some plot of ground to which he had no right.

‘Great heaven!’ cried Charlton, impatiently, ‘let us hear no more of this. Come in at once, and while we are here never pay another visit.’

He was replied to by a promise of obedience ; and on their entrance into the house Edith found a letter from Margaret awaiting her. Her interest was now excited in a new direction ; and eager to know the contents of this letter, which must be important, and desirous of learning them in perfect quiet, she withdrew to her own room. But the letter did not contain the news she hoped for. Margaret wrote that Lord Hanworth was still detained in town by business, and she had not heard one word from him. She began, therefore, to share her mother’s fear that her manner might have been misconstrued ; and she wished for that reason to return to town, when an immediate invitation to their own house must set all right. Margaret added that Lady Allerton had gone to London the same day, and that she felt her departure a great release. She and her mother proposed some day soon to drive over to Calverwells.

They should perhaps sleep a night at the hotel there, in order to see their friends and the beauties of the place comfortably, and then they should return to London. They should try to persuade Edith to accompany them. Sir Simon, if there were no other reason for departure, could not be endured much longer.

Edith sat and wondered, and pondered some time over this letter. It was singular that Lord Hanworth should not have followed up a conversation so begun and so interrupted, by a note, supposing all further verbal explanation to be impossible. It was so very strange that he should be so easily intimidated. She wondered and conjectured, till conjecturing and wondering became tedious, and then she went down-stairs and joined Mrs. Charlton. Charlton was busy in his own room.

‘I have news for you, my child,’ said Mrs. Charlton as she entered. ‘Come here and listen to me, and let me look at your face; I will not have it turned away from me while I tell you. Lord Hanworth is coming here the day after to-morrow.’

‘Coming here!’ said Edith; ‘what for?’

‘Oh, only to see the country, of course,’ said Mrs. Charlton; ‘and of course you are very much surprised?’

‘No,’ replied Edith, calmly, ‘I am not very much surprised. It is nothing strange that Lord Hanworth should wish to pay a visit to his dearest

friends ; and even if it were strange, I should not be surprised, for he really is an eccentric man. I have no objection to his coming.'

'Indeed I should hope not,' said Mrs. Charlton, with a certain gravity of manner ; 'you would appear to me very eccentric indeed if you had any objection to his coming.'

'Dear Mrs. Charlton, you cannot expect me to feel as enthusiastic as you do about him ; but I believe that I shall be glad to see him.'

'That will do for the present,' said Mrs. Charlton, smilingly ; and turning to her little boy, who was showing his skill in spinning her gold thimble, she said, 'Willy, are you not glad that Lord Hanworth is coming to see us ?'

'Oh, yes ; so very glad, mamma. He will fly my kite for me, and he will teach my puppy to beg. And then, too, there are Uncle Edmund and Mr. Stirling coming ; and Mr. Stirling is going to bring me a set of Indian chessmen. Is not that good of him ? Do you know, Edith, he has never seen me since I was a baby, and yet he is going to bring me a set of chessmen ? but Uncle Edmund says he is the most generous man in the whole world.'

Edith leant down and kissed the child's cheek, and hid her face in his curly hair.

By one of those chances that sometimes occur in this world, but so seldom that when they do they appear as the result of contrivance, on the very

morning of the day on which Hanworth was expected, Mrs. Ramsay and Margaret arrived. Mrs. Ramsay, who was rather dull and languid on their first appearance, burst into a flow of spirits on the news that Hanworth was coming, and pleased herself with thinking how surprised he would be to find them. As he was expected to luncheon, it seemed best to put off till that time the proposed country walk; and so till his arrival the time was passed in lounging and talking in the garden. Afterwards, the business of luncheon being almost immediately entered upon, agitated feelings had time to compose themselves or to disguise themselves, and eyes that dared not look up could fix themselves upon the plate in front of them. It was certain, indeed, that Mrs. Charlton twice addressed Hanworth without receiving an answer; but Charlton at once accounted for that by remarking that Willy made too much clatter with his knife and fork; and then Hanworth entered upon a discussion of public affairs in a very creditable manner.

As soon as they rose from table, preparations were made for walking, but Mrs. Charlton and Mrs. Ramsay announced their intention of staying at home; and Charlton undertook the care of the young ladies. To Edith's great surprise, Charlton at once drew Margaret's arm within his own, and led the way with her. She thought this awkwardly and ill done, and she began to consider a variety of ways

for altering the arrangement, beginning with decision of action by telling Lord Hanworth that she wished to keep pace with Margaret. He acceded to her request in silence, and they proceeded all four together for awhile till they reached the entrance of a little wood, where the path was narrow, and they fell into a single file—Edith being the last, Margaret the first, Charlton next, and the child between him and Hanworth.

Lord Hanworth paused, stopped for a moment, seemed curiously to examine a small wild flower that grew on the path's edge, and Edith was obliged to stop also; but on Margaret's account she felt impatient to leave this wood, and she said—

‘ Shall I pass you, Lord Hanworth ?’

‘ No,’ said he, turning towards her, his face somewhat flushed; ‘ no, Miss Somers, I cannot let you pass me. I must ask your patience for a few minutes. I have something to say to you which I must say alone. Let Charlton get on a little in advance.’

The emotion with which he spoke struck Edith; but she remembered the letter from Elderslie, and reassured by that recollection, she became convinced that he was going to speak to her of Margaret. There was a minute of silence, and then in a low tone Hanworth again addressed her, leaving the path and standing in the long grass beside her :—

‘ I do not know, Miss Somers, whether you have

asked yourself why I have come here to-day. I do not know whether I may venture to hope that you have thought so much of me as to wonder at any proceeding of mine, but I feel that I must tell you why I am come; and you must, I think, have been prepared for it by some communication from your kind, your considerate friend, Miss Ramsay. I am come because you are here; I am come to tell you that you are now the object of all my best thoughts and hopes.' He paused for a moment, and then added, 'May I hope?—will you (holding out his hand) give me your hand for one moment, and tell me to hope, and to seek the way to win your affection? Oh, Edith Somers, may I dare to look forward to the day when I may call you my wife?'

Tenderness and emotion added to the beauty of his always musical voice, and his true, deep feeling, showed itself in his face; but Edith was moved with sensations of surprise and of dismay, and this sudden confirmation of her past fears, this sudden downfall of her present hopes, almost overwhelmed her, overturning for the time her better reason, and making her passionate and unjust. She knew well the devotion and the constancy of Margaret's character, and she secretly accused Hanworth of having trifled with it. She allowed herself to be misled by a preconceived notion, and for a moment to believe that he had been playing a double game, but she would not say so; she would say nothing to compromise

the dignity of the friend she loved, of the friend who was so much too good for such a man, whatever her resentment might be. But this resentment she was unable to disguise, though she suppressed the cause of it, and she exclaimed, in tones more indignant than sorrowful—

‘I do not know what I have ever done to deserve this. I beg that you will never repeat such sentiments to me. Pray forget that you have ever spoken in this manner; forget that you have made so great a mistake, and let me forget it too, and try to be happy again.’

With this she passed him, and hurried along the pathway a few steps onward, urging the little Willy forwards; but Hanworth joined her, and said—

‘No, Miss Somers, you must not leave me so. I do not understand you; I surely misunderstand you; I cannot have rightly heard you. Am I to believe, not only that my entreaty is hopeless, but that it is offensive? Is my admiration, my esteem, my affection, an offence?’

The stress upon the word offence was strong, and it was accompanied with an expression of so much pain, that Edith must have been persuaded to feel more for him, but that at this very moment the sound of Margaret’s voice calling to her threw her into fresh agitation, and she said hurriedly—

‘It is a great affliction to me, and it might have been spared. Yes, Lord Hanworth, I am sure it

might have been spared, if you had been more direct, more open, more straightforward. I might then have avoided you sooner ; I might have avoided this trial.'

Little Willy now began impatiently to pull her skirt to go on, and she eagerly caught hold of him, and ran with him at her utmost speed to join Charlton.

'Where is Hanworth?' questioned Charlton, as these two reached him hot and breathless.

There was a pause, which the child happily interrupted.

'Oh,' said he, 'I saw Lord Hanworth turning back, and he looked very hot and uncomfortable, and walked slow.'

'Yes,' said Edith, 'I believe he found the heat too great.'

Charlton directed a searching glance upon her, and she averted her face. They all walked on together for awhile in some constraint, each seeking to appear not preoccupied, but each with thoughts very much absorbed. At last Charlton said that he felt with Hanworth that the heat was more than pleasant, and proposed returning home.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE proposal to return home was readily acceded to. They went back, and found Mrs. Charlton and Mrs. Ramsay still seated in the garden, talking of the difference between London and country society.

‘You must not stay with us,’ said Mrs. Charlton, smilingly, to her husband, ‘for Lord Hanworth is waiting in your study, and he has sent me word that he wishes to speak to you alone on some business matters.’

Mrs. Ramsay looked up inquisitively at her daughter, but received no answering glance. Mrs. Charlton eyed Edith for a moment, but Edith stooped down to play with Willy. She took some of his toy bricks, and appeared to be building with them; but her thoughts were far away from the architecture she was engaged in. She was thinking with a sickening apprehension of the possible chance of actually finding herself alone with Margaret, and trying to resolve what course it were best to pursue concerning Hanworth’s fatal disclosure. She could not resolve upon revealing it to Margaret. She could not resolve upon inflicting upon the friend she most

loved so tremendous a pang. She could not go up to her and say, 'The man to whom you have given your affections—affections sought for by so many others, and so steadfastly denied—does not care for you, cares only for me, and regards you merely as my considerate friend. When you thought he was about to solicit your regard, he was only intending to speak of me; you have been misled, uncared for, and I am the cause.' No; she could not do this; she could not even think of doing it. She must determine instead upon a system of concealment (hating all concealments), leading Margaret gradually to the conviction of Hanworth's indifference, and trusting to the strength and pride of her nature to enable her by degrees to share it. In this way the pain of a great shock would be avoided, of such a shock as well might upturn all the fond associations of the past and endanger the continuance of their friendship. For how would perfect justice be possible, even to Margaret, under such an affliction? and how could anything but passion and injustice be expected from the weakness of her mother?

With so much feeling for Margaret, Edith never once thought of Hanworth, unless now and then to form a secret wish that he had never come across their path, and that he might now disappear from it for ever. She could not conceal from herself that the difficulty of keeping her secret would be considerable, and she feared even that the consciousness

of a reserve might interfere with the happy flow of sympathy that she and Margaret had once enjoyed. So many thoughts could not pass through her mind without shadowing her face: but happily for her, her friends were all so much occupied with silent reflections and conjectures of their own, that they did not observe her, and at last Mrs. Ramsay rose languidly, and said she found the heat very intense, and that she should go and lie down upstairs, 'as was her custom of an afternoon.' Margaret accompanied her, and Edith, dreading Mrs. Charlton's curiosity about Hanworth, said that she had an important letter to finish for the post, and ran to her own room. But she was not allowed to remain there long. Presently came a tap at the door, and Mrs. Charlton's voice praying to come in, in a tone that would not receive a denial, and she was admitted. She looked anxious, and said—

'Edith, my love, William wishes to speak to you in his study. You look ill, my dear, and I can see that you have been crying.'

'I do not wish any one else to see that,' said Edith, 'and I assure you that it will soon pass off.'

She tried to speak bravely, but her voice shook, and while she bathed her eyes, Mrs. Charlton, watching her, saw her hand tremble. Charlton's voice was heard now at the bottom of the stairs, calling 'Emilia.'

'Though he is calling me, it is really for you, my

child,' said the gentle wife. 'Make haste. William never likes waiting.'

'I am ready,' said Edith. And she went downstairs, her anxious friend from the top of the staircase watching her descent.

As Edith entered the room she saw Charlton sitting there with a disturbed countenance, and she felt unable to frame the sentence with which she intended to open this interview. Charlton rose and placed a chair for her, and then seated himself opposite to her with his eyes fixed upon her face. Her countenance fell; he saw it, and chose that moment to speak.

'Miss Somers,' said he, 'pride is a quality which women esteem too highly and carry too far. It is surely not well to be proud of the power to inflict pain.'

'Who is proud of that?' asked Edith, looking up.

'I believe you are. I think you have shown yourself so to-day, when you have appeared to reject as an insult the affection of a man whose virtues, whose qualities are of such a kind that I scarcely believe that any amount of coquetry can pretend to think slightly of them.'

'I am not a coquette. I have not pretended to think slightly of them. You are unjust, Mr. Charlton, and I—oh, I am very miserable!'

She bowed her face down upon her hands, and Charlton saw her shaken with a sudden storm of grief.

'I am sorry,' said he, 'very sorry, if you feel

miserable ; but I think I see how it is. Hanworth has in some way offended you ; he thinks so now : I have thought it before ; and according to the wont of women you are revengeful, and you have determined to punish him. You have done so with too unmeasured a severity.'

'And you,' said Edith, rising from her seat, 'are determined to use the privileges of friendship with too unmeasured a licence. If you have sent for me only to ask me to listen to such unjust reproaches, I must leave you.'

'Stop,' said Charlton, 'it will not do to leave me so. We must understand each other better. If I have gone beyond the licence of friendship, you must excuse me, Miss Somers, remembering how deeply I feel for Hanworth.'

As he spoke an expression of kindness passed into his face, and Edith resumed her seat.

'Miss Somers, I entreat you to feel for Hanworth. Do not deceive yourself, and imagine him insensible because he is self-controlled. Listen to the truth, and acknowledge it. Your refusal, and still more the manner of it, has shaken him to the very centre. Without a grain of vanity, and with as little selfishness as is possible in a human being, he must still feel, with whatever amount of doubt he may have entertained the hope of winning your affection, that he has a right to be astonished at the mode of your rejection, and that he has a right to ask an explanation of it. He does so through me.'

‘It is quite useless,’ said Edith. ‘I can only persist in my request that the subject may never be alluded to again. I of course did not intend to insult him. You may, if you think it can be necessary, tell him that.’

‘I may tell him that? It would be a truly kind, a truly amiable message to take to the man who so earnestly, so devotedly thinks of you.’

‘I am sorry that he has thought of me at all,’ said Edith, ‘and I wish him to think of me no longer.’

‘You wish him, I believe,’ said Charlton, with an increasing severity of manner, ‘to think ill of you; but in that you will not succeed. Hanworth’s generous mind will attribute your conduct, however capricious, however unjustifiable, to some fault rather in himself than in you.’

‘And in that,’ replied Edith, with angry emotion, ‘he will be very different from you; for you would rather imagine the greatest wrong in me than the slightest error in him.’

‘That is not true. It gives me pain to think ill of you; but neither the indulgence that belongs to partiality, nor the courtesy that is due to a woman, shall withhold me from the friend’s truest office—that of speaking the truth; and I will freely tell you, at whatever risk, that in this matter I think that you have acted ill.’

‘You think,’ said Edith, provoked into further injustice, ‘that I have acted ill because I have refused to marry a man for whom I have no sort of

regard, because I have not duly valued the high chance of becoming Lady Hanworth.'

'I do not think ill of you for refusing to marry a man who has not been able to engage your affection; but I do think ill of you for having no sort of regard for him. It is not womanly, it is not Christian-like, to deal so with the feelings of any human being; and it is due no less to yourself than to Hanworth to explain the tone in which you have chosen to reply to him.'

'Stop, Mr. Charlton; your zeal for your friend carries you away. I cannot endure this kind of reproof, this air of dictation.'

With these words Edith rose and walked to the door, and this time she would have been suffered to go, but her own feelings arrested her.

Charlton was a man accustomed to deference; he habitually exercised a strong ascendancy over those around him, that was partly due to the gravity of his manner, partly to his distinguished ability, and partly to his temper, which was not tolerant of opposition.

Edith had been in the habit of looking up to him. She esteemed, she admired him, and to those sentiments was added the tenderness of a very intimate friendship. She paused, then, when she reached the door. Charlton, she knew, was angry, was passionately angry, with her. Her pride resented the manner of his remonstrance, but the thought that such a parting as this might sever their friend-

ship determined her to wait. With her hand on the door she turned round and looked at him : he seemed now impatient of her presence.

‘Have you anything more to say, Miss Somers ? I am going to seek Hanworth. The next train will take him to London.’

He took up his hat as he spoke. Edith still stood at the door.

‘You are undecided,’ cried Charlton, with the light of a sudden hope in his face. ‘You are not quite resolved upon this course—you will think differently—you will try to make your feelings understood ? If Hanworth has merely offended you by some unintentional sarcasm, some unguarded word —(but that I scarcely dare to hope. No. You shake your head. It is not so.)—you would tell him so ; you would freely forgive him. If, on the other hand, his offence should be what he has himself suggested to me, what I fear may be the truth——’

Charlton paused with an embarrassed air ; and Edith could hear the beating of her own heart under the alarm entering into it, that her friend’s deep secret might be disclosed, and the delicacy of her reserve broken in upon. She trembled, and she could not speak to silence what she dreaded to hear, but Charlton’s sentence did not end as she expected.

‘Hanworth’s suggestion,’ continued he—‘and my

own thoughts went with it—was that he had intruded upon affections already engaged ; and that you perhaps thought he had reason to know it. He did not know it. You must believe him, if it is so, that he knew nothing, for the confidence that he partly made to your admirable friend Miss Ramsay was interrupted. Yet he owns that he thought her manner as he approached the subject not encouraging ; and that fear as much as hope determined him to-day to ask for your decision. But if he is guilty in your eyes by intruding upon thoughts sacred to another, your justice must absolve him from any intentional wrong ; and you must use gentleness and kindness while you extinguish his hopes.’

Edith’s whole countenance and demeanour underwent such a change while Charlton spoke that he was at once confirmed in the theory he had adopted ; but she replied in collected tones, and with a becoming dignity—

‘ Neither has Lord Hanworth nor have you, Mr. Charlton, any right to make such a suggestion, nor to ask of me such a question. But let us now end this conversation, already much too long. Let me ask of you to convey to Lord Hanworth my regret—my deep, my sincere regret—for any pain that I may have occasioned him ; and let me hope that he will soon teach himself to forget me. Let me hope that his disciplined and philosophical mind

will soon recover its accustomed serenity. Tell him, Mr. Charlton, that I am sensible of his excellent qualities, but that I can never, never return the feeling that he has expressed for me; and that if I have ever done or said anything likely to mislead him, I regret it with a degree of bitterness that his less passionate temperament cannot even imagine.'

As Edith finished, she opened the door, and Charlton, with a ceremonious bow, passed by her, saying as he did so—

'I will execute your commands.'

Edith retired to her own apartment, there to think over all that had passed; not, however, to think quietly, for though there was silence and peace in her room, there was none in her heart. It was in a tumult of emotion; and as for a moment she caught a sight of her face reflected in the glass, she saw that her cheeks were burning, and her eyes glowing. Her passion was confused and variable, and she sought in vain to define its movements, but through all its variations of disquiet the leading sensation was that of resentment against Charlton, to which her own self-reproaching conscience even added a sting. It was evident, she thought, that he had cared for her merely in a reflected way, for Hanworth's sake. He had thought of her as capable of making Hanworth happy, and when he found that Hanworth was indifferent to her, she had become indifferent to him. He had reproved her with harshness—he had probed

her feelings, careless of what wound he might inflict. She had been willing to forgive him ; to excuse his warmth ; she had spoken with forbearance at the last, and she had even been about to offer him her hand, but he had passed her by coldly—he had disregarded her returning kindness—he had slighted her, and she could not forgive him. To be slighted by a friend so prized, so dear—that was unendurable—that was a wrong that could never be pardoned. So argued her worse nature ; but her better nature interfered with another suggestion. If it were so painful to her to be slighted by an esteemed friend, how must her treatment affect Lord Hanworth ? She had, however, a reply ready to silence that uncomfortable question put by her conscience. Men did not feel as women ; they were not so sensitive, not so refined, not so proud, not so capable of distress. No ; it was for men to do, and for women to suffer. And then the thoughts of the past days, of the concealed thought that Charlton had sought to detect, stole into her mind, bringing with it feelings of mixed severity and sweetness, and merging finally into the fullest sympathy for Margaret, whose coming trial she hardly dared to contemplate. These softer emotions were more natural to her than those of anger, but still anger held its place ; and she found herself admitting the chance of a rupture with Charlton, and making plans for a speedy departure from his house. She would invite herself to

stay with her good old governess, Mrs. Wells, who was married, and whose home was respectable, if not in every way what she could desire. Yes, she would go away, and Charlton should find that her spirit was independent, and would refuse to submit to injustice. Full of these ideas, and intending to act upon them, she went to the drawing-room; but when she found Mrs. Charlton alone there, and when that kind friend rose to meet her with a sweet expression of affection, and clasping her arms round her neck, exclaimed, 'My child, how much I feel for you!' she became conscious of new sensations of soothing hope, and stood for a moment in her arms, without speaking. Emilia broke the silence and said—

'Dear Edith, I now understand all that has passed. Combining some observations of my own with hints—strong hints—dropped to me by Mrs. Ramsay, I know what your difficulty is. Yes, I am sure I know it. Margaret Ramsay is attached to Lord Hanworth.'

'What am I to say? what can I say?' cried Edith, in the highest degree perturbed. 'God alone knows how I suffer in finding Margaret's secret betrayed. Mrs. Ramsay is a fool, and she has discovered what I would have given so much to conceal; but you, Mrs. Charlton; you, dear, sensible Mrs. Charlton, you will not disclose it to any other human being? Promise me that.'

‘I will promise that only my husband shall know it from me.’

‘Well, with that exception I suppose I must be content ; but oh ! Emilia, I am very unhappy, and I must now tell you all. It will be some relief to me to ask you to share my distress.’ Edith then told all that had passed, the largest proportion of which Mrs. Charlton had already guessed. She felt much for Edith’s position, and she wished to advise her well. She said—

‘Edith, you must bear in mind that the fact of your rejecting Hanworth can after all serve little to Margaret, for his love is for you, and not for her ; and if but for this circumstance you could have returned his sentiments, I think you are wronging him and yourself. Such a man ! such virtues, such abilities, and such a position ! All that could be desired !’

‘His qualities are indeed excellent,’ said Edith ; ‘but do not suppose that in refusing him I am making any sacrifice to friendship. No ; I believed from the very first that he was destined to Margaret, partly from what Mrs. Ramsay said on the subject, partly from not understanding his manner, and partly because it seemed most probable. As Margaret’s husband I could have deeply rejoiced in his friendship ; but now that is all over—that happy dream is gone. I am wretched, Mrs. Charlton—yes ! I am truly wretched.’

‘It is a strange fate,’ said Mrs. Charlton, ‘to be

so unhappy for a good man's love. But after all, if Margaret can be kept in ignorance of these events, things may go better than you expect.'

'And we can keep Margaret in ignorance, we certainly can,' cried Edith, eagerly; 'and on that course I am quite resolved.'

'It is unlucky,' said Mrs. Charlton, 'that the Ramsays are coming here to dinner; but they went back to their hotel only to write some letters. I wish now that they were not coming; your position will be so difficult with regard to them to-night.'

As she spoke Charlton entered. He advanced to Edith, and put a letter into her hand. The letter was from Hanworth; she opened it and read it at once:—

'DEAR MISS SOMERS,—I have seen Charlton, and I have learned that I can have no hope; but I cannot go away without thanking you for the message delivered to me by him, and without assuring you that I feel I have only myself to blame for the pain of this morning.

'My own cares I do not wish to speak of; and if I regret the avowal I have made, it is because I believe it has been painful to you.

'You shall have no more disquiet on my account, and I trust that some day we may meet again as friends.

'Yours truly,

'HANWORTH.'

The generous and manly tone of this letter made its way to Edith's heart, and tears fell from her eyes. With softened feelings she gave the letter to Charlton to read, and as he returned it to her he took her hand in his and said—

‘Miss Somers, I suffer for this not less than Hanworth; I suffer because I know that he cannot find another woman equal to the one whose affection he has sought in vain. If I have spoken too harshly to you, you must forgive me, for it was the very sense of your excellence that made me so urgent in this cause.’

Edith looked at him with a gentle look, returned the kindly pressure of his hand, and then moved silently away to the window, where she sat absorbed in her thoughts—thoughts which her friends were willing to allow her to indulge, and which for some space of time she had absolute possession of, till the noisy and excited entrance of little Willy made an interruption. He was hot and out of breath, and seemed to have been crying. He had run home from the hotel, he said, whither, by his mother's leave, he had accompanied Margaret, to whose beauty he had taken a childish fancy, and he was to have returned home with them to dinner; but he had, he did not know how or why, made Mrs. Somers very angry, and now he did not believe that Margaret would dine with them. By some caressing on his mother's lap,

and some exhorting from his father, he was prevailed upon to describe what had happened. He had been in Mrs. Ramsay's room while she was dressing, and she had asked him to tell all about his walk with Lord Hanworth in Pine Wood, and all that Lord Hanworth had said to him; and he had answered that Lord Hanworth did not talk to him, because he was so busy talking to Miss Somers; and that just as he was going to ask him the names of his wild flowers, Lord Hanworth was saying, 'Miss Somers, do be my wife,' and he did not like to interrupt him.

As these words reached Edith, her distress, her dismay, amounted almost to agony, and she darted forward, and seizing Willy vehemently by the hand, cried, 'Oh, child, child, what have you done?'

Willy, already frightened, and in a tearful mood, now burst forth into a great cry, and between his sobs exclaimed, 'You are just the same as Mrs. Ramsay; why do you look so? I did not think it any harm to tell. You never told me not to.'

'No, no, no; idiot that I was; I forgot to speak to you, forgot to forbid you to repeat; indeed, I forgot how much you had heard.'

'Do not cry, my boy, my dear love,' said his father, taking him fondly in his arms; 'you have done nothing wrong, and you have done no harm—only Edith is not well to-day, and everything agitates her.'

Charlton spoke thus, not aware of those circum-

stances concerning Margaret which made this disclosure so peculiarly unfortunate, and he was much perplexed himself by the child's narration and by Edith's emotion on hearing it. But Mrs. Charlton sat in silent meditation, with a look of blank defeat, and presently, as he became more tranquil, Willy recalled the fact that Mrs. Ramsay had crammed into the little pocket of his tunic a letter for Edith Somers, and this, Edith standing by and impatiently urging him the while, he slowly dragged out from a mass of string with which it had got entangled. But when Edith became mistress of its contents, when its intemperance and its injustice (only equalled by its folly) entered into her soul, and she found herself attacked as one of the basest, the falsest, and the most cruel of human beings, she could only wish that it could have remained entangled in that mass of string for ever.

Mrs. Ramsay first challenged Edith to answer her whether the child's accusation (for so she termed his revelation) were true; and then immediately assuming that it must be so, called Edith, quoting Henry V. to Lord Scroope, 'a savage, cruel, and ingrateful creature,' and declaring that though the truth of it 'stood off as gross as black and white, her eye would scarcely see it,' and then went on to say, 'O, how hast thou with jealousy infected the sweetness of affiance.'

'Yes, Edith Somers, Lady Allerton's assertions,

to which my blind confidence refused all credence, have proved too true, and I have found in the friend I harboured for my daughter her treacherous foe. You have come across her path to blight her happiness, to root up and destroy all the sweetest hopes of her most innocent soul. But she shall never have the pain of seeing you again ; go elsewhere, pursue your own way, "still to ruin other's wooing," leaving to us the hope at least that we "shall not look upon" your "like again."

'Alas ! too true it is that "most friendship is feigning, most loving mere folly."

'Make no attempt to see my daughter—she will not see you ; you are not to have the triumph of beholding her affliction.'

The cruelty of this accusation tried Edith beyond her strength. She could no longer attempt to conceal from her friends the extremity of her suffering, and she sank down upon a chair, flinging the letter from her and sobbing convulsively.

Charlton softly approached her. 'Calm yourself,' said he ; 'this violence of grief is unreasonable, is unjustifiable.'

'Ah, my dearest, it only seems so to you,' replied his wife (for Edith was unable to speak), 'because you do not understand the cause of it.'

'Read that,' cried Edith, with passion, 'and you will know all. Oh, Emilia, my dear Emilia, tell me when you have read it, pray tell me that you know,

that you are sure there is nothing of Margaret's there. No, no, no ; Margaret has never thought it, has never felt it, has never even seen it. I will write to her now—now immediately ; not to her mother, but to her. Yes, I will write to her ; I will appeal to her justice and to her pity.'

While Charlton took the letter to read, Edith hurried out of the room.

CHAPTER XV.

TWO days after his sudden departure from Calverwells Lord Hanworth was at his own place in the North of England, and arranging for an almost immediate journey on the Continent. In truth there was not much to arrange, for the house was a small one, and no establishment was ever maintained in it for the reception of company. A few words with his housekeeper indoors, and a few more with his landsteward at one of the farms, sufficed to dispose of all the business part of the visit. For it was rather a visit of feeling than of business. To this place Hanworth's mother had retired on his father's death; it was here that he had been most with her, and here it was that his earliest and deepest affections had been nourished. In thinking of the yet unknown one who might some day be still dearer to him, and renew the springs of love which had been dried up on his mother's death, recollections of his place in the North always mingled with his dreams of the future; and it was as the mistress of Beauchamp Tower that he delighted to contemplate the next who was to bear the name of Lady Hanworth. Until he had the fond advice and sweet assistance of such a friend and

counsellor, he had determined to make no alterations. The old furniture and faded hangings should remain untouched, not the most friendly suggestions of change should be adopted—all should remain, to be altered, if at all, at the bidding of her for whom the task was reserved as a prerogative of wedded love. What Lady Hanworth, his mother, had once arranged, should only be changed by another Lady Hanworth, his wife.

When therefore Hanworth went to Beauchamp Tower, it was with very mixed intentions; partly to endeavour to sooth his mind among the scenes of his happy though somewhat solitary childhood, and partly by a strong effort made on the spot to sever the image of Edith Somers from the hopes with which he had allowed himself so long to connect her.

The complete retirement of the place, and the early feelings it renewed in him, were not without their effect on Hanworth; but it was long before it became at all clear to him that any return to perfect peace of mind could either there or elsewhere be possible for him. Surprise would be a weak word to express his first sensations after his refusal by Miss Somers—for that emotion is excited by the occurrence of the improbable—and Hanworth, with all his modesty, with all his respect for women, with all his tenderness for Edith, had nevertheless permitted himself to think such a determined rejection of him

impossible. Nor could he for the first few days be described as suffering from despair simply, or from ordinary mortification. With Hanworth the sense of such a disappointment—a disappointment leaving no room for hope—was rather like what the passage might be from a sober certainty of the most intense reality to one of those unsubstantial dreams of sickness in which nothing wears a natural or familiar shape, when every object seems to elude the grasp, and when all sights, sounds, and flavours become unsatisfactory and almost insulting to the senses.

This may seem perhaps extraordinary and unnatural in a man of Hanworth's age, temperament, and knowledge of the world ; but with all his philosophy he had no previous experience or training to help him upon the occasion of the dissolution of his cherished thoughts concerning Edith. With no undue value for his position in society, without a grain of vanity, and, as Charlton truly said of him, with as little selfishness as is possible in a human being, he had nevertheless fallen into the grave error of constructing for himself a future, of which, as he now found, the whole fabric rested upon Edith's acceptance of him as its foundation.

He was in love for the first time, and strange to say, that she would withhold her consent entirely from the arrangement he had made for himself, had only crossed his mind as a wild fear, as a notion not to be entertained. She had always, he thought,

seemed to like him, and in truth she did like him. As Charlton's friend, apart from any agreeable qualities possessed by himself, she must have done that. Hanworth could not deny this to himself, even in his most unreasonable moments of self-questioning and anxious reviewing of the past; and when in wayward moods, he tried to convince himself that she could not really ever have been happy with him, and that she did not and could not ever understand him, such a theory went to the winds the moment it was constructed. Yet again and again it was formed, but always as often to be dismissed, and Edith would stand still before him as the one person perfect in herself, who could have made his perfect happiness. She was so clever, she liked and disliked all the same things and people with himself. They never had differed in all their many conversations on art and literature, except to agree the better for it afterwards.

How often, to vary his fancied domestic happiness at Beauchamp Tower, had he dwelt in fancy on imaginary tours with her by his side; the scenery they would admire together; the world-famous pictures and statues they would see together as wedded lovers, after having so often discussed them merely as friends. How certain he was that no discordance of opinion would have marred the pleasure of revisiting his favourite haunts with her, and that everything would be seen with double enjoyment when

she shared it with him ! Then her position was all that he fancied or had ever wished for : a well-born lady, but without rank, to which he was indifferent ; not penniless, but with no fortune to be an element of attraction. Even her lonely condition had pleased him. But now all was over, and added to his own grief was the knowledge of the pain his proposal had given to the one person to save whom from pain he felt that his whole life might have been best dedicated.

Full of such thoughts, Hanworth paced his solitary rooms, or chafed up and down between the clipt hedges of the old-fashioned garden, or galloped across the wolds ; and some days passed, during which the change of scene and the efforts of a well-regulated mind to recover its order after the fatal rout to which it had been exposed, did not fail to have their due effect, at first unconsciously, but at last so obviously that Hanworth was aware of the improvement, and asked Charlton to join him for a short time at Beauchamp Tower before he left it to go abroad.

No sooner did Charlton receive the letter from Hanworth containing this request, than he complied with it. He had been trying to persuade himself that it would be discreet as well as friendly to offer to join Hanworth in his solitude ; and now that he was asked to do the thing he most desired, all the preparations for his journey seemed too slow, and even the travelling by express train not as speedy as

it ought to be. He was grieved to leave Edith so unhappy, but his wife promised to do her best to comfort her, and in the most sensible way she kept her word. She did not attempt to deny that it was uncomfortable to receive such a letter as Mrs. Ramsay's. She did not affect to disbelieve that a cloud was hanging over the future intercourse with Margaret. She confessed honestly that things were as they were, and with equal honesty she lamented over them, and hoped to see them presently shape themselves better; and then, she gently laid aside these topics, and taking Edith out with her into the quiet woods, she sought to turn her mind to other thoughts.

It would have been difficult to keep up a desultory conversation under such circumstances, but Mrs. Charlton persuaded Edith to take a favourite volume, and read to her aloud; and though she saw at first that she only entered upon the task as a duty, she soon observed with pleasure the rising colour and the sparkling eye, that showed a growing interest and an excited feeling. Then came the discussion on the book, and for awhile the present life and its painful entanglements were forgotten. Edith had written, according to her intention, to Margaret, entreating her to try to think justly of her, and after having taken this step, she had heroically resolved to revert no more to the subject of her grief. In such companionship the reso-

lution could be well carried out. Emilia's mind and her own were not only both cultured, but cultured in the same direction. The imagination of each was lively, and they found pleasure in the same paths of thought; in fact, there was that true sympathy between them which is the best foundation of a chosen friendship, and which makes the introduction of personal talk and of the grievances of daily life needless for the support of interest. The men who believe that such an intercourse, that such a companionship, cannot exist between two women, are very much in error.

To the soothing effect of these walks and talks was added the enlivenment of the child's frequent but not too constant presence; and it was only when she retired to the solitude of her own room that Edith was still conscious of being unhappy. In the course of two or three days a letter came to her, directed in Margaret's hand, and she opened it with an eagerness that nothing else had inspired since the fatal moment of Lord Hanworth's proposal. It contained indeed only a few lines, but those had comfort in them. Margaret wrote:—

‘ I cannot think of you as my mother does. I do not distrust you; but it is impossible that we should meet again for some time.

‘ Yours always attached,
‘ MARGARET RAMSAY.’

These few lines were made many by the number of times that Edith read them over, and each perusal brought new sensations with it; first it was a great relief to find Margaret in this one matter differing from her mother; next, it was a bitter blow that a long parting was thought unavoidable; then the brevity of the letter was strange; and afterwards there was something singular in the handwriting, an unwonted trembling, suggestive of illness; in some aspects it indeed appeared to her as though the letter were written in a reclining posture; but now Mrs. Charlton came in with a consolatory difference of opinion. The handwriting struck her as regular, as even peculiarly strong and firm for a woman, and the slope was such as she thought it impossible to obtain in a recumbent posture. Holding the letter to the light, she could indeed detect a slight deviation from steadiness in the word Margaret, but it was nothing more than an impulse of hurry would account for; and she could see nothing either in the manner of folding, of direction, or of expression, indicative of feebleness. The brevity was, considering the occasion of the note, not more than discreet, and the parting enjoined for the present was clearly judicious. Edith's tears fell when she said so; but by degrees she began to admit some justice in Mrs. Charlton's observations, and on the whole she felt her troubles lightened; and she was presently able to share her friend's delight at the anticipation of

her husband's return from Beauchamp Tower, and to join her in the walk to the station to meet him.

They all three met much happier than when they parted. Charlton looked well, and as soon as the first greetings were over, he told them that he had left Hanworth in good health, and apparently interested in his preparations for travel. He was going to Italy to renew the happy impressions of his youth, and Charlton only regretted deeply that he was not able to accompany him; but when he had expressed that regret, Hanworth had said very gravely, 'if I had the happiness of a home of love like yours, I should not wish to travel from it.' This was the only allusion he had made to recent events during all the days they were together; and Charlton had learned to value him more dearly than ever, witnessing the perfect subjection under which he held his passions, and convinced, as he was, of the depth of his sensibilities; he quoted George Herbert's lines on the 'Constant Man,' who—

When he is to treat with sick folks, women, those whom passions
sway,
Allows for that, and keeps his constant way;

and said that Hanworth was the only man he knew to whom they could truly apply.

Edith, to whom these observations were partly addressed, and who was stung by the point of Charl-

ton's quotation, rejoined that it must without doubt be easy for a mind like Hanworth's to overcome a foolish fancy—a whim that his love of departing from the conventional in all things had perhaps inspired him with. He had taken a liking, she believed, just because such a liking was not expected of him.

These remarks were muttered to Emilia, but Charlton overheard them, shrugged his shoulders, changed the subject, and from that day resolved that Hanworth's name should be no more spoken between them. He presently told his wife of another letter from his brother, which led him to expect that, at the end of a week, he and Stirling would be in London. Charlton's intention was to go to town to meet them, and to bring them on with him to Calverwells. A sudden tremor seized Edith. Mrs. Charlton observed her emotion, but waited till they were at home and alone to indulge her curiosity about it. She then said to Edith as they sat working together,

‘I am looking forward with singular interest to an improved acquaintance with my brother-in-law, my husband's only brother. We were only just introduced to each other when he went out to India. It is a strange feeling, is it not, to be less than acquaintances and yet more than friends? We have since exchanged letters as brother and sister, and of all the congratulations I received on the birth of my

little Willy, I think his were the most affectionate, the most truly kind. Dear fellow ! he has gone through difficulties and dangers, and has in many a fearful hour been a subject of anxiety to our hearts ; but thank God he has come safely and honourably through them all, and has added fresh distinction to my husband's name. They are very opposite characters, yet strongly attached. I think, Edith, you must feel some curiosity to see Edmund, and I fancy you are well acquainted with his particular friend, Mr. Stirling.'

'I know Mr. Stirling very well, indeed,' Edith replied, with a forced composure ; 'and his sister, Helen Stirling, was my intimate friend ; but I have seen little of her lately. Circumstances arose which were painful to me, and which made, though not an actual estrangement, yet certainly a division between us ; but only yesterday I received a communication from her which must restore things to a pleasanter footing again.'

Mrs. Charlton ventured to inquire into the nature of these circumstances.

'I can have no reason now,' replied Edith, 'for withholding them. Helen Stirling contracted at the age of seventeen an engagement with Mr. Hastings, a young curate. They had no means to marry upon. Her parents were desiring for her another alliance ; so she determined to keep the engagement secret, and I was made (and I must always regret it)

the unwilling confidante. It was quite impossible for me to betray the secret. I disliked it, I disapproved it, but I was obliged to keep it. Her character is a passionate and a resolute one. I had no power to influence her, and I could not even persuade her to confide in her brother. I was grieved at first, but at last I was roused to resentment by finding her, without consulting me, arranging a meeting with Mr. Hastings at my house; and in my father's presence I was made the apparent object of his attentions. My father, my dear old governess, I well remember, and Mr. Charles Stirling, were present on this occasion. I was beyond all description annoyed, and I cannot even now think of the circumstance without indignation and confusion. I felt myself forced into the position of practising a fraud on those whom I most loved and esteemed; and when after the presence of these selfish lovers was withdrawn, my governess whispered to me, "My dear, I fancy Mr. Hastings thinks a great deal of you," I determined to endure such proceedings no longer, and I wrote an angry letter to Helen, in which I declined to see Mr. Hastings at my house, though I still felt myself bound to keep the secret. I have seen little of Helen since, and soon afterwards her brother went to India. This was a painful experience in my life—a very painful one, indeed,' Edith sighed.

'But you have forgotten,' said Mrs. Charlton,

‘to tell me what Miss Stirling’s communication was yesterday.’

‘Oh, true, so I have. Her engagement is declared. The death of an uncle who has left some money to Mr. Hastings, and the immediate prospect of Church preferment, have at length put an end to the necessity for concealment. Would it had happened sooner! It has been going on five years. You can believe that my position was trying, for I was not allowed to speak on the subject even to Margaret—my dear Margaret!—and I frequently reproached myself for the intimacy that I had allowed to spring up too quickly between Helen and myself, feeling afterwards, as I did, that I must withdraw my affection. Her passion was headstrong and selfish, and she could engage in a long system of fraud, of daily deceit, without one scruple of honesty, without one pang of contrition. I could not countenance her conduct to her parents, and I could not endure her treatment of her brother.’

‘Her brother?’ said Mrs. Charlton, suspiciously, but trying to veil her suspicion by a tone of casual curiosity. ‘You said, I think, that you regarded her brother with esteem?’

‘With the highest esteem,’ answered Edith, carried by the interest of her subject beyond the usual limits of her discretion, ‘with the highest esteem that I ever felt for any man. If you ever know him, Emilia, as I have known him, you will feel the

same, though you may not be immediately struck with him. He is not exactly a brilliant man, but he is a very able one; his manners are plain and straightforward, his understanding is powerful and original, and his character is vigorous and honest. He has no half opinions; everything about him is decided and strong, adventurous and chivalrous; he is earnest and energetic in all his views; he follows them out, indifferent to what may be said of him, and indeed he never thinks of himself; but I feel that I injure by attempting to describe him. You must know him.'

'I hope I shall,' said Mrs. Charlton; and she then folded up her work, left the room, and hastened to the library, where her husband was immediately called upon to put aside his papers, and listen to 'something particular.' At the end of ten minutes' conference it was settled between them that Edith was certainly in love with Charles Stirling.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE moment of the arrival of Edmund Charlton and his friend was an agitating one to Edith but Mrs. Charlton was herself so excited, and the little Willy was in such a hurry of expectation and prattle, that she might reasonably hope that her own feelings were unobserved. Mrs. Charlton, after the first greetings were over, began, according to the wont of women, to reflect on Edmund's appearance. Was not his hair much darker, had he not grown much broader, much older, much more resolute looking. He had no doubt it was so, but he could not profess to know it himself; he must trust to her observations; he had no wife to note his alterations from day to day, no one to tell him even whether his moustaches were becoming. While these little family comments were going on, Charlton now and then joining in them, Edith became conscious that Stirling's eyes were fixed upon her, and she turned away embarrassed. She had hardly seen him when they first shook hands, but yet she dared not look at him now, and when he spoke a few words to Charlton merely about preparing for dinner, the

sound of his voice seemed to go through her. It was so long since she had heard it; it was a recovered treasure, and she stood still, almost breathless, for fear of losing a syllable; but soon after he had spoken he left the room. Still she knew she should hear him speak again; she might listen to him at dinner, and before he left Calverwells she believed that she might find courage to speak to him. At dinner she was seated next Edmund Charlton, and he claimed her attention so much that she had very few moments granted for hearing Stirling talk. This is a painful position, probably known as one of the miseries of human life to most human beings, to be constrained to give attention to one who is indifferent to you, and in this effort to shut out the sound of a voice whose every accent is precious. Through this trial Edith supported herself, by the frequent reflection that it must at last come to an end, and so it did. And in the drawing-room, after dinner, Stirling approached her as she stood near the window, and after a few moments of silence, he said,

‘Have you heard from Helen lately?’

‘Yes; I heard yesterday, and her letter contained an important communication, which I suppose you have already received.’

‘I have heard nothing more important than that she has finished working her altar-cloth for Longcross Church.’

‘You do not know then that she is soon to be married?’

‘No! To whom?’

‘To Mr. Hastings, the curate of Longcross. He has the promise of preferment and a legacy from an uncle, so now they are able at last to marry.’

‘Able to marry—my sister—Mr. Hastings—this is indeed new to me—at last! Then their attachment has been a long one, and long known to you?’

‘It has,’ replied Edith; and then with a movement of confidence springing from their early friendship, she added in a tone of regret, ‘longer than it ought to have been.’

Stirling was agitated. He said at intervals, rather to himself than to her, ‘This is news indeed,’ and walked to the other end of the room, then presently back again, and finally he went out and took a walk.

The next day Mrs. Charlton observed to Edith that she was rather surprised to find Mr. Stirling disposed to prolong his stay; she had understood that he had consented to sleep at their house only for one night on his way to his father’s house; but now she found that he was certainly wishing to remain with them another day. To these observations, made with a significant emphasis, the only reply that Edith made was, ‘What a very beautiful day it is! Do you not think, dear Emilia, that we had better take a stroll on the common?’

Mrs. Charlton, who had hoped for a different kind of answer, said with a shade of vexation in her voice, that she had no wish to walk, and then left Edith, to join her little boy.

That same evening Edith and Charles Stirling were sitting alone in the drawing-room, watching from the window some gathering clouds, when Stirling said, 'I believe I ought to go home to-morrow ; I have had a letter to-day from my sister, and she wishes it.'

'I am very sorry you must go so soon,' Edith murmured : her voice was scarcely audible, but love is quick to hear low tones, and Stirling heard her.

'Will you,' said he, eagerly and tremblingly, 'will you ask me to stay?' As he spoke, he extended his hand towards her, hers appeared to advance a little way, and he took it in his own. At this moment, Mrs. Charlton entered. Stirling moved away confused, and she herself appeared scarcely less so. She would have wished to leave them alone, but the dinner hour was too close at hand to do so with any advantage, and so she resolved on a better line of tactics, and as soon as her husband entered she proposed that they should all after dinner take a stroll to Pine Wood, a proposal which was received with favour ; and when, after a dinner which seemed to Edith to last the time of three ordinary meals, they set out on their walk, and Stirling took his place by

Edith's side, it was evident to the experienced matron that before their return home they must be engaged lovers. So it happened, and so, in five minutes, the troubles, pains, and perplexities of five years were explained away.

Stirling had watched Mr. Hastings with jealous eyes, and had finally concluded that Edith was secretly engaged to him. In this frame of mind he had gone to India. His sister had confirmed his suspicions by never contradicting them. She had not considered what his feelings might be for Edith ; she had thought only of herself and her secret. The letter in which she had just now announced her engagement to her brother had in it a touch of shame, but not so much as there ought to have been. Now, however, that the lovers were certain of each other's affection, they were prepared to forgive everything and everybody, and they talked over their troubled history till they at last convinced themselves that on the whole their long trial must be esteemed as an advantage.

But when Edith in due time revealed all to Mrs. Charlton, she did not succeed in persuading her to think the same. On the contrary, Mrs. Charlton thought that the course of events had been singularly unfortunate, and she could not relent at all towards Helen Stirling. Stirling might, under other circumstances, have remained in England ; Edith would then have become openly engaged to him, and Hanworth


would not have had the misfortune of loving without return. This was a reflection which saddened Edith, and the contrast of Margaret's present position with her own rising vividly before her, she sat down and wept. Having brought her to this point, Mrs. Charlton began to administer consolation, and confided to her that Charlton, when he went to town to meet his brother, had called in Chesterfield-street, and had been told that the ladies were too much engaged to see him, as they were preparing for an immediate start for the Continent. Charlton had rejoiced to hear this; it was evident that change of scene must be useful, and that it must be desirable to remove Mrs. Ramsay from the temptation of betraying her daughter's feelings by her open lamentations.

With this opinion Edith warmly concurred. She was certain that it was Margaret's own sensible arrangement, and she relied a good deal on her strength of character. It was also certain that she was not ill in health, and it was a happy thing that she had active occupation in the necessary preparations for leaving home. It was now a duty for Edith to go through the form of communicating her engagement to her father, though it was certain that he would trouble himself little about it. He esteemed it indeed a disgrace for a woman not to marry, and therefore he would probably rather hear of any marriage than of none. Stirling was of a good family,

and the connection was such as there could be no objection to. The consideration that his daughter must go out to India could not in any way affect him, nor was he likely to feel any solicitude as to her pecuniary prospects, though those were far from brilliant.

It was left to Stirling himself to lament for Edith that his post was not so important nor so lucrative as he could have wished, and to dread for her delicate frame the trial of the Indian climate. This he did as he talked with the Charlton brothers over his prospects. The younger looked upon his fears and agitations with surprise. 'His post was not so very bad; they would have enough to live on; the climate was not so very terrible; many ladies really enjoyed it; and for his part, if he could have the luck to secure such another partner, he would return, to his heats, his rains, and his punkahs with entire satisfaction.

But the elder brother viewed the thing differently, and confessed with gravity that he could not look upon their future altogether without concern. He and his wife indeed both had some difficulty in appearing to Edith duly satisfied, while they secretly repined at a lot so different for her from what they had chalked out. But it is an undoubted fact that in the matter of marriage people will not pay enough respect to the conjectures of their friends, and that almost every wedding excites a good deal of surprise, a good deal



of resentment, and some expressions of contempt; such as—‘ Well, there is no accounting for taste: we must not expect to judge for others; but what she could find in him, or what he could discover in her!’

Charlton, as soon as the expected letter from Colonel Somers arrived to sanction Edith’s engagement to Stirling, wrote the intelligence of it to Hanworth, feeling it right at once to quench any ray of hope that might be yet lingering with him; and Edith herself wrote the same day to Margaret, addressing her letter to Chesterfield-street, to be forwarded. She believed that by this time Margaret might have left London, but the letter would certainly be sent after her. Her mind was now much relieved, and her father’s letter, though totally devoid of affection, was so far satisfactory that it informed her that by the end of the next month his house in town would again be his own, and that he should soon after that come to London, and settle down with her soberly there for awhile before her marriage.

As the Charltons would also be returning to London about that time, the arrangement seemed to be a pleasant one, and Edith resolved to invite her old governess to pay her a final visit in town. She must wish to see all who had ever been dear to her before such a long separation as the departure for India would involve, and indeed her heart sank

within her sometimes when her eyes met the affectionate, anxious glance of Charlton and his wife. But when she walked out into the sunny fields, and Stirling walked with her, all these sensations were forgotten, and she was conscious only of the intense happiness of a recovered love.


CHAPTER XVII.

EARLY in the year following that in the autumn of which we have hitherto been living, a few people were assembled one evening at Charlton's house in London. Edith Somers was there—still Edith Somers, and not Mrs. Charles Stirling—for delays had arisen to postpone the marriage, which had not been at first anticipated. Colonel Somers, after having begged for time to make arrangements, and having thus occasioned the day of the wedding to be more than once put off, at last announced, what he might as well have announced at the beginning, that the state of his affairs did not admit of his making any immediate or certain provision for his daughter. The money which had been her mother's, and to which Edith had always been taught to look as her own—on the very few occasions when such subjects had been mentioned to her—had not been legally secured, and had been nearly all consumed by Colonel Somers in covering the excess of his expenditure over his income for many years past. It was impossible to say how soon, if ever, it could be replaced. Stirling's official income in India was uncertain, and not enough to marry

upon; and a few years at any rate must elapse before, in the ordinary course of promotion, it would enable him to offer Edith a proper home.

By degrees, therefore, the prospect of an immediate marriage had melted away, and in its place was growing up the less happy idea of a long engagement, involving the return of Stirling to India alone, and of Edith remaining in England, also nearly alone. Edith and Stirling, therefore, were not the happiest of the persons at Charlton's house; for though in the first exultation of their feelings at their reunion they had promised each other that nothing, while they were assured of their mutual affection, should ever disturb their serenity, they found themselves, when this unlooked-for delay occurred, still subject to the common lot of humanity, and capable of suffering from disappointment.

Sir Simon and Lady Howell were present, for the Baronet's life was now crowned with joy. The parliamentary vacancy that was expected had actually taken place; and a combination of circumstances, in which Sir Simon himself was virtually the least important personage, had finally led to the election of the owner of Elderslie to be one of the members for the division of the county in which it stood. He was now in London, in close attendance on his public duties. To the surprise of every one, Lady Allerton too was at Charlton's, having in fact asked herself. There was not much going on in town, and



Lady Allerton thought it would sound creditable to her understanding to have been at one of Mr. Charlton's parties. So she waived all minor differences, and followed up her own invitation by going to Mrs. Charlton's house; but secretly resolved in the impertinent depths of her own bosom that Mrs. Charlton should be asked to nothing of hers of which she could boast.

'What a privilege to be here!' said Lady Allerton to Valentine Vernon; 'I expect to lay in a stock of wit and literary talk enough to last a poor creature like myself all through the season.'

'Nay, Lady Allerton, we wits are very dull fellows; you must find your own good things if you mean to honour us with your company. We save up all ours to put them into our books. They are too precious to be wasted in conversation, even with Lady Allerton.'

'You, Mr. Vernon! I never suspected you of being a wit. How should I?'

'By listening to what I say; but it is not your way to listen much to any one. I wish you had been here at breakfast yesterday; you would have been so bored; you would have been forced to hear so much clever talk.'

'Did Mr. Charlton give a breakfast yesterday—one of his breakfasts?'

It was the fact that Charlton had given one of his breakfasts the day before. The company had been

such as would have made any young aspirant to literary or social honours happy for the rest of the year by admission to it. There had been a famous bishop and a learned dean, a great historian and the editor of a great review, a great publisher and the last great traveller; an under-secretary of state and one of her Majesty's judges; a literary peer from the Upper House, and a political leader from the Lower one; and there were two dusky princes from the East, in shawls and turbans, with their interpreter, to whom the occasion must have been more unintelligible than all the other wonders of England had been to them. Not the Thames Tunnel—not the mysterious Company in Leadenhall-street—not Birmingham—not Manchester, with all their marvels—not even the House of Commons itself—could have so amazed them.

The bishop was jocular, the dean was erudite; the historian harangued, the editor descanted; the publisher anecdotized, the traveller was marvellous; the judge was bland, the under-secretary was pompous; the peer was pleasant; and the House of Commons leader ate an enormous breakfast and went away to a committee without having spoken at all.

'He was a sensible man,' said Lady Allerton, listening eagerly to the incidents of the breakfast thus described by Vernon.

'Yes,' said Vernon, 'for he saved himself for the

evening's debate, when he made an eloquent attack on the gentleman who sat next him at breakfast. Charlton cannot expect his lions to roar at his table in the morning, if they are to exhibit on the Treasury Benches at night.'

'Now this,' said Lady Allerton, as Vernon came to the end of his description, 'is what I call a Madame Tussaud party, with all the notorieties jumbled together; obliged to meet, whether they like it or not—to pocket their enmities, and stand sweetly looking on each other. But I really do pity a poor harmless bishop introduced into this lions' den.'

'I never before heard of a harmless bishop,' said Vernon; 'and the holy man in question is not deserving of the disparaging epithet. As for the assemblage generally, it may outwardly have had a semblance of Tussaud; but there is this material difference, that Tussaud's party is silent. I am a poor man, Lady Allerton, but another time I would rather pay to see the wax-work show than have the live exhibition for nothing.'

'I have my suspicions,' said Lady Allerton, 'that there is a covert malice under Charlton's invitations.'

'Is that why he has asked you?' said Vernon.

'Do not let us waste any more time talking to each other,' replied Lady Allerton; 'I really have not leisure enough to consider your question. I perceive in the distance two famous novelists, an

eminent professor of natural philosophy, a witty play-writer, a well-known geologist, and a divine singer; and I must make haste to diminish the distance between us.'

'Which do you mean to make up to?' asked Vernon, keeping still by her side as she moved towards the group she described.

'Try to guess.'

'The two novelists?'

'Why do you think so?'

'Because you will like to give them some of your experiences, and help them to a little fresh satire.'

'No; they have enough without my help. The truth is, I want soothing. My dialogue with you has ruffled my temper, and I must look out for a little complimenting. I want to be comforted.'

'Well, then, the divine singer?'

'No; a singer can never talk.'

'The witty play-writer.'

'No, wits are never pleasant.'

'Then,' said Vernon, 'here comes the man to suit you, for here is Sir Simon.'

Sir Simon joined them.

'Is Lady Howell going to charm us with a song?' asked Lady Allerton, as she greeted him, not knowing what else to say.

'No,' replied Sir Simon, 'certainly not. I have just been requesting of her to have a sore throat.'

The company is too mixed ;' and with a stiff bow he passed on.

' You will see me,' said Lady Allerton, taking no notice of this interruption, ' make up to the philosopher, for the reputation he wishes to win is that of a man of the world, and so he trades in the very article I want to buy ; and I shall not have spoken to him for three minutes before he will have paid me a compliment, either on my person or my sense ; I am indifferent which, so long as he puts me in good humour with myself again.'

With this she left Vernon, who soon saw her bowing and smiling, apparently much elated, in close companionship with the professor of physics. He now took his place near Edith Somers.

' Miss Somers, I am glad to see you here. I am always glad to see you ; but you do not look as glad yourself as you used to do.'

' That is very wrong of me, for I am happier than I used to be.'

' Of course, since you are engaged to be married, and Mr. Stirling is in the room. When are you to be made unhappy by the loss of him ? When does he set out for India ?'

' In another month. He has exactly one month more.'

' You are counting the days left, and you sigh over every one departed ; but, my dear Miss Somers, my dear Edith, you do not know how to value your

own good fortune. You ought to rejoice in events which prolong the period of courtship, which add another volume to your romance. Imagine the delight of his letters! how closely written they will be; and how interesting the postman will become to you!’

Edith sighed.

‘You do not look as cheerful as I expected at the prospect. Well, women never will be reasonable, even the best of them; they are born impatient, and cannot endure delays. Do you know I have been writing to Hanworth to-day on some matters of political importance; and when I had finished my dry details, I set to work to enliven them with a little gossip. I told him a little about Sir Simon, a little about Lady Allerton, and a great deal about you.’

‘About me! Oh, Mr. Vernon, what could have induced you—why should you have mentioned me?’

‘Because you came into my thoughts; and I said, *here is a creature that I thought a model of feminine excellence, and I find her full of feminine weakness. She has engaged her affections in the most unthrifty manner to an honest, poor man; and she looks pale, and droops because he must leave her in order to provide for her.*

‘Mr. Vernon! this to Lord Hanworth! What right had you?’

‘The right of my own humour, and of my regard for you. I found it necessary to vent my feelings—I often do that to Hanworth; for having few of his own, he has room to receive mine. He will look over my letter with a philosophical eye—wonder why sensible people make such a mistake as to fall in love, and why I should concern myself about other affairs than my own. After that he will destroy my cleverly-written letter, and think so little about its contents, that when he comes back among us again, as he must soon do, your engagement will still be a piece of news for him.’

Vernon, half in jest, half in earnest, really fond of Edith, and really annoyed to see her suffering from her present position, was, according to his custom, following the impulses of his peculiar temper while he spoke, but he was unconscious of the amount of pain he was inflicting; and he would have been pained himself had he understood the feelings with which she now averted her head. But if he failed to appreciate the extent of her discomposure, he did not at least fail to perceive that a change of subject must be welcome, and he directed her attention to a group, of which Charlton and the two novelists formed the centre, and in which Lady Allerton and Mrs. Lacy were prominent figures.

‘Observe,’ said he, ‘how humble Lady Allerton appears to-night! How she is smiling and assenting to the observations of the satirist; and how

much she is making of Charlton's acquaintance ! She is conscious that her individual charms of nature and of art are not enough. She must claim a share of his superiority by his favour.'

'And yet,' said Edith, 'I do not believe she has ever read a syllable of his writing.'

'Of course not,' said Vernon ; 'her way of life leaves her no time for that ; and if it did, his poetry would be alien from her temperament. It is not his mind, but his position that she values : not the thing that he is notorious for, but the notoriety of the thing, that she is bowing down to ; and in that she is not singular. When men are hunted as lions, it is not for their merit, but for the noise of their merit. Just now her efforts are stimulated by the presence of that pretty countess—fashionable as well as pretty—who is consenting to receive the homage of the novelist and satirist. It amuses me to see fashion paying court to wit.'

'I take more delight,' said Edith, 'in looking at beauty. I am charmed with that lovely face, which looks to me superior to all the servilities you are describing.'

'Why beauty,' said Vernon, 'has no need of servilities ; it rules without a struggle. Its dominion is secure and therefore serene ; and I can easily believe that that sweet countenance belongs to a temper as sweet as itself. In spite of the moralists, Miss Somers, I hold beauty to be the best gift of

nature. It has been, as you observe, denied to me, and so it is very handsome of me to confess it.'

At this moment Stirling approached Edith, and Vernon left them together. That their conversation was deeply interesting to themselves no one can doubt; but what is so very interesting to two not unfrequently wearies a third, and the reader is therefore not invited to join in it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

EDITH was sitting one morning with her good old governess, Mrs. Wells, pondering over the course events had taken, and wishing it had been otherwise, when a knock at the door was heard, which was a relief to Mrs. Wells, as it gave her an excuse for breaking the silence. She was able to wonder at a knock so unwontedly early, to decide that it was certainly not Colonel Somers, and to doubt whether it were a lady or a gentleman, before Mr. Charlton came into the room. Edith immediately saw in his manner and countenance some matter of importance, and she wondered with a sensation of anxiety whether he had any news of the Ramsays. He had no wish to keep her long in suspense; he was quite as eager to tell as she to hear, and as soon as the proper courtesies to Mrs. Wells were over, he drew Edith aside, and addressed her in a low earnest tone. He had a letter from Hanworth, a letter that must be to her of the deepest concern. Hanworth had exerted his interest with the Government to get a post of some value then vacant offered to Stirling, and he had received the assurance that his wishes would be complied with.

He trusted that Stirling would esteem the place worthy of his acceptance, for though with his knowledge of him he could not esteem it wholly worthy of his merits, it would have the advantage of retaining him in England, and the salary annexed to it might enable him to marry without imprudence.

Such were the contents of Hanworth's letter. As Charlton made this communication to Edith her colour came and went, her lips trembled, and tears that she vainly struggled to restrain, flowed down her cheeks. Charlton, without taking any apparent notice of her emotion, expressed his own. 'I cannot tell you,' said he, 'how this letter has affected me. It is impossible to describe to you the consideration, the delicacy of feeling, with which it is written; indeed, he is so afraid that you should imagine yourself in any way obliged to him, that he will not even confess to me (but I need no confession) that he has done this for your sake: he would have me think that his sense of the particular fitness of Stirling for this place and his own esteem for him have solely influenced him. This event, Miss Somers, will be communicated to you presently in a more welcome manner by Stirling himself, but I felt it a necessity to speak to you on the subject.'

'Thank you,' said Edith, 'thank you. I am truly grateful for this; how grateful, I am afraid even to try to tell you.'

Her voice shook, and she turned away to conceal her face. Charlton took her hand—

‘I rejoice,’ said he; ‘I am happy in the prospect of your happiness, and I am happy in the possession of Hanworth’s friendship. I have always been so; I grow always more so; it is my second blessing in life: but, by the bye (smiling), I must not omit a message from my first. She is very anxious to see you, and to talk it all over as soon as possible.’

‘I will go to her,’ said Edith, ‘as soon as I can; but,’ she added, with a slight blush, ‘I must write a note to Mr. Stirling first, in case he should call while I am out.’

As Charlton left the room Mrs. Wells remarked, ‘I declare Mr. Charlton looks quite handsome to-day; there is such a glow on his face, any one can see that he is a bearer of pleasant tidings, and it is wonderful how the feeling of such an office can give a charm to plain features.’

‘His features may want regularity,’ replied Edith, ‘but I think they never want a charm.’

‘I allow,’ said Mrs. Wells, ‘that they never want meaning; but then the meaning is not always so agreeable as it is to-day.’

Edith sat down to write. In her present state of emotion she was not prepared to enter into a discussion of Charlton’s personal appearance; and after her note to Stirling was finished, she begged that

Mrs. Wells would not wait luncheon for her, and hurried off to receive Emilia's sympathy.

This was fully bestowed on her, and Mrs. Charlton was, as usual, ready to talk and to listen exactly in the right proportion and exactly in the right way. She was as willing to rejoice in Stirling's change of position as in Hanworth's generosity, and she expressed her own satisfaction in the prospect of Edith's happiness and in her continued residence in England with a warmth that was unmistakeably sincere. They talked over the matter indeed in all its bearings till Emilia's imagination pictured to her the wedding as almost an immediate occurrence; and she began to contemplate the choosing of the trousseau and the commencement of married life. Here she had experience and advice to help her friend with.

'You will not, I am sure,' said she, 'resent a few suggestions from me.'

'What could I ask for better,' replied Edith, caressingly, 'than counsel from one so happily married?'

'Happily married, indeed,' said Emilia, with emotion; 'and you will be so too, my love, for I see in Mr. Stirling a generous, self-sacrificing nature, a good and honourable mind; but still you must teach yourself not to expect too much. You must not look forward to a long romance; for daily life, however full of love and trust and virtue, must have its crosses, its little trials, and its routine duties; above

all, believe me that the first year of marriage is not the happiest, and if clouds seem then gathering over your head, do not on that account give way to despair, and fancy yourself doomed to a stormy life, for well as you may know each other, dearly as you may love, your mutual understanding cannot be so complete as after-time will make it. A woman in the first year of her wedded life has to learn how constantly to please her husband. It is well, my love, when she with her whole heart determines to learn it, and to make every other thought, every other pursuit, subordinate to this. I fancy that unhappiness often proceeds from a dislike to yielding in trifles and from a desire to exhibit spirit, to which women are sometimes urged by unwise friends, who suggest to them that they must have a proper pride, that they must not submit to slavery, and so on.'

'My only desire,' answered Edith, in a low tone, 'will be to make my husband happy.'

'I am sure of it,' said her friend; 'and he will be happy, only you must not look forward to seeing him in a continual ecstasy: you will not. I know that with all your romance you are too sensible for that; but I really do believe that many women become unhappy, restless, uneasy, and dissatisfied, and make their husbands so, from entertaining hopes which must entail disappointment.'

'I promise you, then,' said Edith, 'not to indulge

in them, but to look forward soberly, quietly, and even, if you particularly wish it, with a touch of despondency.'

'Saucy girl, you know that I do not wish that, though I own it had better come before marriage than after.'

'That is quite certain,' said Edith; and after a pause she added, 'Emilia, do you not think that Mr. Vernon's letter, of which I told you some days since, has been in great measure the cause of Lord Hanworth's efforts in our behalf.'

'I certainly think so.'

'Then, angry as it made me at the time, I am really much indebted to him for writing it. I am happy now, Emilia, very happy, but for three thoughts.'

'What are they?'

'The first is, my dear absent Margaret; the next is, a sense of remorse because I have sometimes looked on Lord Hanworth with so little candour, so little justice.'

'I cannot deny that I think you once did so,' replied Mrs. Charlton, 'but there were some extenuating circumstances in your case; and now, let us talk of that no more, but let me hear what is the third thought.'

'It is a regret, a bitter regret, that I have nothing to give to Charles Stirling—that I am a portionless wife.'

‘That regret,’ said Mrs. Charlton, ‘is not a worthy one. He loves you, he has chosen you, and in giving him yourself you are giving all that he desires. Still it is natural that you should feel it; I felt it once too myself. Ah, my child, how all this brings back to me my first beginnings—the trembling love passing into fear, the doubts, the trepidations! Love brings humility with it, and I thought I must appear very unworthy to my husband’s family and friends. I hardly dared to talk to them; I sat silent when they were present, imagining their criticisms, and when they went away I cried over my own want of sense. They probably never guessed my feelings, and they certainly made no efforts to relieve my embarrassment; but whenever Lord Hanworth appeared amongst us, I was conscious of support, courtesy, and encouragement. With his superior intelligence he made the most of the little that I possessed, and with a skill equalled only by his kindness, he knew how to lead the conversation to the subject I was best informed upon. Then, those who had before been willing to neglect me, seeing that such a man thought me worthy of regard, began to show me civility, and so I gradually acquired confidence.’

‘But I know Charles Stirling’s family and most of his particular friends already,’ said Edith; ‘and I am not the least afraid of any of them, and never intend to be so.’

‘Then you will escape one trouble that I had to go through.’

When Edith returned home, a visit from Stirling added to her happiness. He brought with him a letter from Lord Hanworth, addressed to himself, so full of friendliness, that the manner of the offer of the vacant post seemed to double his satisfaction in the change in his fortune, and he had besides received a message on the subject from a higher quarter—he was at that very moment on his way to have an interview with a member of the Government on the subject.

Edith was now able to satisfy the curiosity of Mrs. Wells, and to gratify her affection by imparting to her this good news, and she felt herself in a tumult of joy that would hardly allow her to rest for a moment or to interest herself in any of her accustomed occupations. The next morning’s post, however, brought with it news that sobered her feelings, in a letter from Margaret, dated Hotel de l’Europe, Genoa.

‘MY DEAR EDITH,—I think that you must already have heard of my present severe affliction, and I am quite sure that you feel truly for me. You must have heard from my sister that my mother is taken from me: my dear mother, my kind, my adored mother. Oh! Edith, she loved me so much,—only too much. She made my griefs her own. My sister must tell you how it happened, and how what appeared a

trifling illness came to a fatal termination. I cannot dwell upon this, I feel my strength fail me while I try to write.

‘ This is misery ; this is the real taste of sorrow that I never knew before.

‘ I have only our maid Morris and the courier with me now ; but in their way they feel for me, and without them my position would be worse—much worse.

‘ I feel a bitter sense of desolation, which I try to relieve by prayer.

‘ I was alone yesterday in my sitting-room, at the table, writing to my sister Sophia, and exhausted with the effort, I had sunk down with my head upon my hands, when the courier opened the door and delivered some message which I failed to hear, and afterwards looking up, I saw Lord Hanworth before me. His presence excited no emotion ; I think I was in a sort of lethargy. He looked at me very kindly, and apologized for his intrusion, but he said, he thought I might, alone in a foreign country, possibly need the assistance of a friend, and he wished to assure me that in him I had one close at hand. He had just arrived at the same hotel. I tried to thank him, and he asked me if it were my intention to return at once to England.

‘ I said it was.

‘ He said, “ You are hardly fit, Miss Ramsay, to undergo the troubles and fatigues of travelling alone. Some friends of mine are about to set out for

England—Mr. and Mrs. Wilson. Mrs. Wilson is Dr. Silverston's sister : you must allow me to make her known to you. I am certain that their company on the journey home will be a help to you."

' I bowed, and thanked him, and he left me.

' After he was gone, I thought with a kind of comfort over this interview, for it was certain to me from his whole demeanour that he had no suspicion of those sentiments that I once entertained concerning him ; and not until he was gone did I myself recall the feelings of the past, for the desolate present now absorbs all my thoughts. What bitterness, what pangs I have endured before, you alone can guess ; and I know that you are good, and honourable, and that you will never betray me. And now you must believe me when I assure you that for these things I suffer no longer. In the conflict of feelings that I have gone through this comfort remains, that I am able to acquit Lord Hanworth, and myself too, of any actual blame, and to ascribe my fatal mistake to a series of unlucky circumstances that led my friends and my most dear mother into an erroneous impression. I must always value Lord Hanworth as a friend, and I cease to find it difficult to reduce my feelings to the measure of his own.

' Mrs. Wilson has been here ; kind, amiable, and considerate. I shall travel home with her. It seems best so.

' Good-bye, dear Edith ; I do not wish to cloud

your happiness by asking you to dwell on my heavy trial, but you must think of my darling mother with affection, you must regret her as the kind friend of your early days, and forget the late estrangement between you. Only two days before her death she spoke to me with interest of your present prospects.

‘With thanks for your last confiding letter, and with true wishes for your happiness,

‘I am ever your attached

‘MARGARET RAMSAY.’

‘It seems,’ said Edith, as she finished this letter, ‘that I am never to be allowed to feel happy for long. I begin indeed to think that it is impossible with warm affections to enjoy much peace. Now I almost reproach myself that I have been rejoicing while Margaret has been mourning: poor Margaret—her position so peculiarly painful, too. Nor can I think of Mrs. Ramsay, from whom many years of kindness must outweigh one act of injustice, without regret, —without much regret.’

Mrs. Wells endeavoured to sympathize with these reflections, but being aware only of a portion of the circumstances of the case, she could not do so completely, and Edith was wishing for some one who could enter more fully into the case, when Sir Simon Howell was announced. She at this moment forgot his pomposity, his stiffness, his coldness, his stupidity, and sprang eagerly towards him. Sir

Simon checked this movement by ceremoniously offering her a chair, and then observed to her that he supposed she had heard from Genoa the news, which he could not but consider very shocking, very bad, and altogether unexpected, of Mrs. Ramsay's death. Edith said she had just received a letter from Margaret.

'Lady Howell,' said Sir Simon, 'received one yesterday, and I must say that she received it with considerable surprise, and of course with affliction. In Margaret's last letter from Nice, it was mentioned that Mrs. Ramsay was suffering from a feverish attack, but it was not thought a subject for any anxiety, and her decease appears to me quite unaccountable. I must say quite unaccountable. It has indeed taken me by surprise. It will be necessary for Lady Howell to put off altogether her party for Thursday week, and it is her intention to return to Elderslie. All our plans are deranged by this unfortunate event, and for political reasons it is extremely unlucky that our party is to be postponed. But such a mark of respect is undoubtedly due to the memory of Sophia's mother.'

'Undoubtedly,' said Edith.

'Lady Howell,' continued Sir Simon, 'is convinced that Margaret must certainly be now engaged to Lord Hanworth, and we feel, I must say, that she has forgotten what is due to an elder sister in keeping her so much in the dark. However, we know it all,

of course, without being told, and we are not disposed to solicit confidence. Margaret is coming home immediately, and I learn from other sources that Lord Hanworth is also returning. I only have to remark that they are both strange, eccentric people, and indeed that the whole thing is eccentric.'

It was thus that Sir Simon disposed of Mrs. Ramsay's death and of Margaret's trials.

'Lady Howell,' he added, after a pause, 'will be happy to receive her sister at Elderslie on her return.'

Poor Margaret ! thought Edith ; that would be a dreary prospect for her, with so little affection and so little sympathy ; and she sighed.

'Allow me now, Miss Somers,' said Sir Simon, 'to congratulate you on the appointment of Mr. Stirling, of which I have just heard, and allow me to assure you that it meets with my entire approbation, and that I consider Stirling an exceedingly fit man for it—I really believe a fit man. Vernon has just told me of it, and Vernon says that he is thoroughly up to the duties of the post. I inquired very anxiously, very particularly, of him if it really were so ; for in these days, Miss Somers, we are conscientious. A member of the House must be always on the watch ; a member of the House is bound never to wink at the failings of a friend in office.'

Edith reddened at the bare idea of Sir Simon

winking at Stirling's failings, but smothered her resentment in silence, and inquired—

‘Has Lady Howell written to Margaret?’

‘Yes, she despatched a few lines immediately. Lady Howell is always punctual.’

Edith's first longing to hear something from Sir Simon was fully satisfied, and she now actually welcomed the entrance of Lady Allerton, which for a while suspended their confidential talk. Lady Allerton was at once shocked and delighted to find Sir Simon; shocked, because her visit seemed, under the circumstances, almost like an intrusion, but delighted because she wished so much to learn all the details of ‘poor dear Mrs. Ramsay's death,’ the news of which had just reached her. Sir Simon was so seldom in the position of having any intelligence to give, that he was willing to make the most of this, and he dwelt upon such details as Margaret's letter to her sister afforded with so much verbosity that Lady Allerton's impatience got the better both of her curiosity and her courtesy, and she interrupted him with—‘Poor dear woman! And pray, did she quote at the last?’

Sir Simon on this was justly offended, and took up his hat and wished her good morning; and Edith remained, struggling with her indignation, while Lady Allerton pretended not to perceive it, and went on trying to satisfy her mind on a more important point.

‘Have you heard,’ said she, ‘that Hanworth is also at Genoa; and do you not think it rather a coincidence—a singular chance?’

‘Considering the tour that each party has been making,’ replied Edith, ‘their meeting at Genoa is, I think, not a singular chance.’

‘Geographically, perhaps not; but morally, considering all the circumstances that you and I are aware of, it is singular—in fact, it is not a chance.’


Edith dared not hazard an answer, doubtful as she was as to the extent of Lady Allerton’s knowledge, and by her silence she invited her to continue—an invitation that Lady Allerton was never slow to accept; and she went on—

‘It cannot be reasonably doubted that Margaret Ramsay is now the Lady Hanworth elect, though at one time I thought another’ (with a searching glance) ‘destined to that post. However, of course we all know now how it is.’

‘But I do not know,’ Edith replied, and so the conversation ended.

CHAPTER XIX.

A WEDDING is well known to be the mournfullest and most tedious of human festivals, and therefore the reader is not invited to be present at Edith's, but is requested to believe that it took place with all suitable forms, and to imagine both that and the honeymoon—which was of only a fortnight's duration—well over, and Mrs. Charles Stirling established in London under promising and comfortable circumstances. Margaret having returned to England, and having passed some time with her sister at Elderslie, where she had found the friendship of Dr. Silverston and his family a source of comfort, was now coming to stay with her earliest friend ; and Edith was expecting her with a mixture of joy and apprehension. When she arrived, it was difficult to her to control her impatience, and not, as in the days of their childhood, to run into the hall to meet her. Margaret, however, mounted the stairs with a somewhat tardy pace ; and when Edith clasped her in her arms there was a good deal of languor and dejection, though there was no want of tenderness in her manner of receiving these greetings. It seemed that she dared not give way to her feelings, for fear of



their passing the limits of her control ; and she sat for a few minutes in silence. Then she said, " I am so glad you are happy, Edith ! " but her clear sweet voice was husky and tremulous.

' I am very happy now,' said Edith, ' because I have got you with me again ; ' and she bent over her and kissed her forehead.

' It is well for me,' replied Margaret, ' that you love me, for you are all I have left in this world to care for me ; ' and in saying these words, that told the desolation of her heart, the power of surmounting her emotions deserted her, and she burst into a passionate expression of grief. Edith watched her with a sympathy too deep to admit of common attempts at consolation. She knew that whatever Mrs. Ramsay's follies had been, Margaret had possessed in her a loving and indulgent mother, and that her loss must at any time have brought much sorrow with it ; and she knew also that the time at which it had occurred must have doubled that affliction—a time when she was struggling against an affection that had been bestowed unhappily where it had never been sued for. It appeared natural to her that these two trials following so close upon each other should mix together, should cease to take distinct forms, and should merge into one great sum of grief. It appeared natural that the loss of the devoted parent should be peculiarly felt when her sympathy was peculiarly needed. Not till the

passion of Margaret's tears seemed to be subsiding, Edith ventured to speak, and then it was to suggest that she should retire to her room to lie down and rest; and Margaret at once complied with this request.

When Edith left her she found her own tears flowing, and she passed a solitary hour full of sad thoughts for the friend whom, next to her husband, she loved. But at the end of an hour Margaret joined her again with a serene countenance and a composed manner. Edith looked at her with an increased admiration. The perfect beauty of her features was heightened in its effect by the expression of a subdued sorrow, and all her movements had acquired a new and more attractive grace.

'O Margaret, how beautiful you are!' Edith said so with enthusiasm, but Margaret shook her head and smiled sadly.

'I thought myself so once,' said she; 'but if it was ever true, it can be true no longer. Do not say so again, Edith. Tell me, now, are not the Charltons your near neighbours? If so, I should like to go to see them, for I would gladly have the first meeting over.'

Edith was rejoiced to find Margaret wishing to renew her intercourse with these valued friends, and she lost no time in getting ready to go, fearing with every minute that passed that her courage might decrease. But Margaret looked quite firm and

resolved when they set out, and it was only when the door opened to them that an augmented paleness betrayed her emotion.

As they entered the drawing-room, there was an evident agitation in Mrs. Charlton's manner of receiving them; and as they advanced further, it was explained by the sight of Lord Hanworth. It was a most unlucky chance. Edith had not seen him since her marriage—not since the scene in Pine Wood; and yet if she had met him alone, she thought she could have done so almost without embarrassment; but with Margaret for her companion, there were too many conflicting sensations for composure to be possible. She was conscious of grasping Emilia's hand with a painful force, and she seated herself in a hurried manner, lest a trembling in her knees should be detected. She turned away so as to avoid seeing Margaret, and yet longed to look at her. She bowed to Lord Hanworth, and then felt that she ought to shake hands with him, and advanced to do so. Lord Hanworth's colour rose; but he extended his hand with the kindness of friendship, and as he said a few words of greeting, a fine ear only could have perceived the shade of emotion there was in his voice. After this he turned from Edith to Margaret, who had moved away with Mrs. Charlton, addressed her with a manner full of interest, and seated himself near her to make inquiries after the Wilsons, the Silverstons,

and Lady Howell. Wholly unconscious of the internal struggle that it cost Margaret to enter into such a conversation with him, he went on at particular length, partly with a desire to compose his own feelings, and partly with a view to relieve Edith from embarrassment. Mrs. Charlton, aware of the position of all parties, moved from one to another in a flutter of feeling, making disjointed observations. When she spoke to Lord Hanworth 'there was a peculiar dampness in the air,' when she addressed Edith 'it was dry and dusty'; in fact her presence of mind under these trying circumstances altogether deserted her. It was for Margaret that she felt most deeply, and she viewed her quiet dignity of manner with admiration. She was answering all Lord Hanworth's observations with becoming politeness, and even with apparent ease; and there was only so much of languor in her bearing as her recent loss might well account for; but no doubt it was a relief to her, as it was also to Edith and to Mrs. Charlton, that Charlton and his brother now entered the room, followed by little Willy. Charlton, as he eyed the group in his drawing-room, looked for a moment perturbed; but quickly determining what it was best to do, he passed on to Margaret, and engaged her in conversation.

Lord Hanworth rose and took his leave, merely bowing to Edith, who appeared at the moment of his departure deeply engaged in conversation with

Edmund Charlton. How much the value of acquaintances, and even of friends, depends upon their casual position !

To Edith, on many preceding occasions Major Charlton had seemed a tedious personage, but at this moment he was welcome ; and the abundance of his talk (he was a ready talker) was a real comfort. His description of his walk with his brother and little Willy, which, had it been given some months back in Stirling's company, would have appeared intolerably elaborate, was now a happy piece of eloquence. As soon as it was over, Edith begged to introduce him to her friend Miss Ramsay, and as he turned towards her, the admiration with which her beauty struck him was very apparent. It was evidently difficult to him to withdraw his eyes from her face ; and in seeking to open a conversation with her the habitual frankness of his speech deserted him, and it became necessary for his brother to suggest a few observations for him. But it was not desirable to prolong this conversation. Now that the impulse of strength that a true woman's pride had lent to Margaret during Hanworth's presence had subsided, a sense of fatigue and depression showed itself in her countenance and in the abstracted manner of her replies, and she was clearly suffering. It therefore seemed necessary to Edith to shorten the moments of Major Charlton's enjoyment, and she rose to go, not failing to observe as they departed that Edmund

accompanied them as far as the hall door, and that when they were turning the corner of the street he was still standing on the step following them with his eyes. But this was a secret observation, and she said nothing about it to Margaret, nor did they exchange a single word concerning Lord Hanworth, but confined their remarks to the changes that had taken place in little Willy. Margaret thought him looking pale, and doubted whether he had not outgrown his strength, and Edith suggested that his father was guilty of taking him walks that were too long; and they dwelt on these trifles merely. For it is certain that whatever may have been the case among men and women in ancient days, it is not true in the history of modern society, that 'out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh;' but that the very reverse is the fact. Edith returned home to find Stirling, who had come from his official duties a few minutes before her, impatiently longing for her presence. Margaret had to be introduced to him, to claim his friendship almost before his acquaintance, to promise herself to determine to like him, and then to retire to her room to solitude and thought.

CHAPTER XX.

IT was no wonder to Edith that Major Charlton in the course of four days found as many reasons for calling upon her ; but Margaret observed to her with a weary air that he seemed to have no occupation but visiting, and that he was, like other Anglo-Indians, much troubled with idleness.

‘ You must recollect,’ said Edith, in reply, ‘ that he is my husband’s most intimate friend. It is surely natural that they should have a great deal to say to each other ; and if Major Charlton is idle now, it is only because he is enjoying a short holiday. He is a most excellent officer as well as a valuable friend, I assure you.’

‘ Oh, I do not doubt it ; and he is Mr. Charlton’s brother, too ; but very unlike him, I think.’

‘ In some ways he is, but he has the same candour of disposition.’

‘ He has a candour of his own, but it is not like his brother’s. Mr. Charlton is candid with his friends, but reserved with his acquaintances ; while to Major Charlton it seems a necessity to express all he thinks at once to everybody he meets. From that very circumstance he is probably a more popular man, but

for my own part I prefer a certain reserve. Reserve indeed generally proceeds from the consciousness of some uncommon qualities—qualities which it is not possible for the whole world to sympathize with. Now, I like a character of this kind.'

She had scarcely finished her sentence when Major Charlton was announced.

This time his errand was not of a cheerful nature; he came to say that his sister-in-law was in a state of anxiety, that her little Willy was ill—he really thought very ill; it had begun merely with a cough, but he really seemed seriously ill. He found immediate and warm sympathy from both his hearers. Could they be of any use to Emilia? Should they not at once prepare to go to her? Major Charlton could not deny that he thought Emilia would be glad to see them. It would be a satisfaction to communicate the apprehensions she suffered from to such true friends, and they might think better of the child's case than he did himself, and than his brother did. His brother appeared much alarmed, and Dr. Flower's opinion had not been satisfactory. The parents had denied themselves to all visitors in a general way, but such intimate friends they would certainly welcome, and indeed Lord Hanworth had just been admitted. Hanworth was the child's godfather, and attached as he was to both parents, he must feel deeply interested. Margaret, who was just about to leave the room to put on her bonnet,

now turned back, and said that she thought it better for Emilia that they should postpone their visit till she was quite disengaged ; they would wait till later in the afternoon. Edith agreed. Much talking would be bad for Mrs. Charlton ; anxiety might find relief in venting itself to a friend, but to have to make conversation, or even to see many people moving about you, always augmented uneasiness. With this they sat down, Major Charlton also seating himself, in order to endeavour to persuade them that they were mistaken. He thought a little society would cheer his sister ; he thought there was nothing so bad for a troubled mind as to be alone ; whenever he was put out himself, he went in quest of a cheerfully disposed brother officer. After all, Hanworth was of a grave temperament ; he was an excellent man, certainly, but his company could not be called enlivening—in fact, when he came away they were all three sitting silent. If his brother and Hanworth should talk, it would probably be about some public question that Emilia could not care about ; now, if Miss Ramsay and Mrs. Stirling would go to her, she would directly feel their sympathy.

‘ And we intend to go,’ said Margaret, ‘ but later in the day. Pray, Major Charlton, tell her so ; tell her to expect us.’

‘ I will do exactly as you wish,’ replied Edmund ; but though Margaret’s sentence certainly contained a

gentle hint to him to go, he still lingered in her presence, his eyes fixed, not upon her face (for there was something in her manner that forbade such a look), but upon her hands, as they moved in some pretty piece of embroidery.

‘You are very industrious, Miss Ramsay,’ said he; ‘I think I never find you idle. I wish I could paint as you do; as for the embroidery, I cannot wish that, for it looks so difficult as to be quite beyond the reach of a man’s hand. Now, though I cannot actually do the thing, I can just imagine taking a brush full of colour, sweeping it across the paper, and swashing in a blue sky.’

‘You had better learn,’ said Margaret, ‘it would be a good occupation during your holiday.’

‘Ah, that is a rebuke. You think me idle; does she not, Mrs. Stirling?’

‘And at this moment you are idle,’ replied Edith; ‘but you must surely find plenty to interest you in London after so long an absence. If you are disposed for painting, you should go and study it at the National Gallery and Marlborough House.’

‘Well, I would,’ replied Edmund, ‘if I had any one to study it with me,’ and he glanced at Margaret; ‘but I have not Stirling’s luck. I am like that poor milkmaid in the nursery song, “all forlorn;” but I think that I shall stroll down by and bye to see the new panorama.’ He now rose to go, but in taking leave took another look at Margaret’s

work: 'And what,' said he, 'can that beautiful needlework be intended for?'

'It is a frock for Willy Charlton,' replied Margaret.

'Dear little fellow,' cried Major Charlton. 'God grant that he may live to wear it!' As he spoke, tears rose to his eyes, and he left the room hurriedly.

'He loves the child,' said Margaret.

'He is full of feeling,' said Edith.

When some hours afterwards they went to the Charltons, it was to find their friends in a state of increased anxiety, and the child more seriously ill. As Margaret stole gently to his bedside and watched his flushed face and restless movements, the remembrance of the last sick bed she had attended forced itself upon her with a deep inward pain, while in the mother's countenance she saw a fear as pressing, as trying as her own had then been. It was moving to see how, when they left the room, Emilia sought by her questions to find in them a hope that in her own heart had given way to fear; and how she clung to her husband's often-repeated observation, that children possessed a rallying power much beyond that of those in mature life, and that the forebodings of doctors were constantly set at nought by them. In this way they gradually talked the mother into something like hopefulness; but when Charlton took leave of them at the door,

the expression of his countenance struck them as at war with his cheering words.

And there was indeed but too much reason for anxiety, which, as days went on, went on augmenting. It was not only that the lungs, with the congestion of which the illness had begun, were threatened, but that every function of the body was disordered; and the playful little boy whose laugh was wont to fill the house with its pleasant sound, lay stretched on his back helpless, powerless, unable to eat, unable to speak, never smiling, constantly moaning, his mother continually by his bed-side, listening to every sigh, watching every turn, and singing his favourite nursery songs, for the familiar tunes soothed him when all other sounds seemed to add to his fever, while her heart was inwardly dreading, desponding, and praying; but to her frame a supernatural strength seemed granted. She could watch through the long night with only one hour of sleep, without any physical suffering, without even the consciousness that she had not slept. Margaret would sometimes steal in and take her place, continuing the low monotonous song, and prevailing upon the mother to stretch herself upon a bed in the adjoining room, by the promise of waking her at the slightest symptom of change in the child. Edith had her home duties, but Margaret was free to fulfil all the offices of friendship, and her warm heart led her to do so with the utmost devotion.

She could well sympathize with all this anxious trouble, and she knew how and when to come with her tranquil, unobtrusive help. On one occasion, as she entered the drawing-room, she found Charlton standing alone before the picture of his boy, and as she looked at him she thought she saw traces of tears upon his cheek. She went softly to him, holding out her hand. He led her to the sofa, and as he seated himself by her side, he said,

‘Poor Emilia! Willy has been worse this night, is worse now. Do you know that picture has just now seemed to fade before my eyes? its fresh colour all disappeared: it became first dim, and then quite blank.’

‘Your eyes,’ said Margaret, but she spoke tremblingly, ‘are weary; you have not slept; the picture has not really changed; it looks as fresh as it did a fortnight ago before your darling was ill.’

‘Before he was ill. Ah, poor Emilia!’ repeated Charlton, and sighed heavily.

Margaret perceived from his tone and look that he had now no hope left; and indeed the servant’s reply to her eager inquiry at the door containing the doctor’s last verdict, had prepared her for such a state of things. She hardly knew how to speak or what to say; she was too wise in such a case to suggest an untrue hope, and a gentle inquiry after Emilia was all she ventured upon.

‘She has fallen asleep,’ answered Charlton; ‘poor

thing ! she has fallen asleep at last, from complete exhaustion, on the sofa in the next room.'

The folding-doors between the rooms were open, but the sofa was so placed as not to be seen by Margaret where she sat.

'The nurse,' continued Charlton, 'has promised me to come down to wake her should any danger appear, and I must let her sleep now ; poor Emilia !'

While Margaret listened to Charlton, and watched the movements of his countenance, she was filled with admiration for that deep affection which led him to set aside his own grief, his own loss, and his own trial, while he dwelt so feelingly on the mother's. Yet it was difficult even for a mother more passionately than he did to love this child.

After a moment's pause Margaret said, 'I will go now to sit by Willy, and you may rely on my watchfulness and faithfulness. I will come to you at the slightest sign.'

As she spoke she moved to the door, and as she opened it Hanworth entered. Margaret stepped back as he advanced ; and while with that expression of goodness and loving-kindness that gave an irresistible charm to his countenance he laid his hand on Charlton's shoulder, and said, 'You have watched too late, you are not looking well,' her heart beat quick, and she turned her face away, that he might not see her colour rise. He did not. Yet he looked with some solicitude at her too.

‘And I think,’ said he to Charlton, ‘that you must let me now take a share in your boy’s nursing. He is my godson, you know, and a very affectionate one.’

‘Affectionate!’ replied Charlton, in a tone that sunk into Margaret’s heart. ‘Ah, Hanworth, you do not know; he has no power left now, even to love. He does not recognise his mother.’

Margaret, fearing lest her sympathy should too strongly betray itself, and desirous also of avoiding Lord Hanworth’s presence, passed through the folding-doors, out at the adjoining room, and thence to the apartment of the sick boy.

Hanworth remained with Charlton, aware that the hour of the doctor’s evening visit was near, and desirous of turning away his friend’s mind from the sickness of expectation which such an hour brings in cases of dangerous illness. The calmness and tenderness of his manner were soothing to Charlton’s irritated nerves, and he listened now and then to what Hanworth said, instead of straining his ears for the sound of carriage-wheels. But the doctor was late, and before his arrival Hanworth was obliged to go. As he rose to depart, Mrs. Charlton was heard to stir in the adjoining room, and her husband went to speak to her such comfort as he could. Hanworth then left the room silently, and turned to that where little Willy lay. He had seen him most days for a few minutes at a time since his illness; there

was great fondness between the child and himself; and though from what Charlton had told him there seemed little chance that his visit would give the accustomed pleasure, he wished at least, for his own satisfaction, to look on the boy once more. The door of the room was ajar, and he entered noiselessly. The child was lying on his back, with a flushed face, to which the upturned eyes and the restless movement of the lips gave an unnatural and distressing expression. Margaret Ramsay was kneeling by the side of the bed. Her face was turned from him, and unaware of his presence she continued in a low tone her lulling song. He sought to leave the room unperceived as he had entered it, but the door creaked on its hinges, and Margaret looked up. As her eyes met Hanworth's, the colour rushed up into her cheeks for a moment and then deserted them again, leaving them paler than before. Hanworth paused for a moment at the door, turning towards her, and said in a low tone, 'You must not watch too long, Miss Ramsay; you have already undergone so much,' and then he went away.

The tears now streamed fast from Margaret's eyes, rising from a source of emotions so mingled that she could not herself define them, nor was it desirable that she should do so too curiously. Hanworth's observation had recalled the time of her own loss, and he was at that moment in her presence because of his anxious love for his friend's dying child. He

was thinking of her too with solicitous regard. Under that serene exterior there was a heart ever sensible of the trials of others ; a disposition to seek to relieve them ; a perfect benevolence which shrank from display, and was therefore not always appreciated ; and yet to her how clear it seemed, and how perfect ! But she was resolved not to suffer herself to meditate on the subject of Hanworth's virtues, and rising from her knees she sought by some occupation in the sick-room to change the current of her thoughts. She made ready a mixture, put some fresh barley-water on the fire, and offered to assist the nurse in some needlework upon which she was engaged ; but the sound of the doctor's step on the stairs now gave her the change of emotion she was seeking to obtain, and her heart sickened as the solemn man entered, followed by the pale, weary, trembling mother. His approach to the bed, the drawing of the curtain to admit light, the careful lifting of the coverlet, were actions which each brought a fresh pang of apprehension, and she saw Emilia turn away as if unable to face his look while she asked for his opinion. When he said, in the same unmoved voice with which he would have pronounced the case hopeless, ' Mrs. Charlton, there is a decided improvement in your child,' it seemed hardly possible to contain her feeling, and she longed to strain the mother to her heart. But she refrained from any demonstration of her agitation, and stood

quite quiet, watching Emilia's face. Her increasing pallor and immovability of posture for a moment seemed to threaten fainting, but a flow of tears came as a relief, and then all was well. Margaret now advanced to her and pressed her hand. 'Go and tell William,' whispered Mrs. Charlton; and Margaret ran eagerly down on this mission, leaving the mother to consult further with the doctor and nurse.

She was stopped at the drawing-room door by Major Charlton, who entered upon a full tide of questions. In vain Margaret repeated 'He is better, he is really better; now let me go instantly to your brother.' She was always called back for another word, till at last she abruptly passed him and ran to Charlton.

'Oh, Mr. Charlton, there is a favourable change, and I bring you a good message. Dr. Flower thinks well of the case.'

Charlton, who had been uneasily pacing the room in an agony of fear, almost overwhelmed by this sudden change to hope, sat down on the sofa, covering his face with his hands. Then he rose, and spoke a few earnest grateful words to Margaret, while his brother came to him and shook him repeatedly and cordially by the hand, saying, as he did so, 'I always thought he would get over it; I never would give it up;' and turning to Margaret with fresh questions, 'Is his medicine to be changed? is the skin moist? is the pulse stronger? when will

he be able to eat again?' which inquiries, spoken in eager haste, Dr. Flower slowly entered to answer with the true medical deliberation.

Margaret, satisfied and happy, returned home to Edith, and in her rejoicing over the change in the child's condition she omitted to mention her short interview with Hanworth.

CHAPTER XXI.

FROM this day of improvement, the change for the better in the little boy was rapid, and every succeeding morning found his strength increasing. But during the period of convalescence no less care was required than during that of illness, and the task of amusing him became difficult; while his desires, surpassing his power of enjoyment, brought him into a condition of fretful impatience. Under these circumstances, Emilia found in Margaret's affectionate assiduity a great solace; while the mother, resuming her household duties, was compelled to short periods of absence from the child, Margaret would take her place, and cut out figures in card, carriages and sledges, and invent such lively stories about them that the boy never failed to be amused in her company. Major Charlton would frequently join in these efforts, and sometimes Hanworth would come in with a new toy. The child's wonted affections had returned, and to Hanworth he would stretch out his arms, claiming a seat on his lap. On one occasion as he did so, Major Charlton viewed him uneasily, and rising from his seat he took a turn up and down the room, watching Margaret

as she moved the figures for Willy, and Hanworth as he now and then added a sentence to the little drama constructed for them. At last he said,

‘ Hanworth, do you know I am jealous of you ? I am that boy’s own uncle, and yet he always seems to me to prefer you. That is what comes of going out to India ; one’s place at home is taken by others ; and when one comes back, after all one’s exile and one’s battles, one is scarcely recognised in one’s family ; and one is grown so rusty as to be quite deficient in the ways of society. I declare I am old, too, before my time. Yes, we Indians wither before we ripen,—turn grey, yellow, and shrivelled,—and see men older than ourselves look younger. I might pass for your senior. I am glad my regiment is ordered home. I could not make up my mind to go out again.’

This speech, addressed to Hanworth, was yet felt to be directed at Margaret ; but Margaret kept her eyes down, fixed on the child’s playthings, and Hanworth replied,

‘ If Willy seems fonder of me than of you, satisfy yourself that it is not owing to your exile, nor because I have been more with him, but that just lately I have been less with him than yourself. It is because I am more of a rarity to him ; and it is, I suspect, not my frequent presence, but my frequent absence, that gives me an attraction. He will confess it, if I ask him. Willy, my boy, what made you so glad to see me to-day ?’

‘Why, I did not see you yesterday,’ replied the child, clasping his arms round his neck as he spoke.

Hanworth smiled, and said,

‘I am right. It is not because of your long exile, but because you have had no short exiles since your return, that you are not made so much of as you wish. The secret, depend upon it, of maintaining an excitement in affection, is an occasional absence and a certain degree of uncertainty.’

‘That is not impossible,’ said Major Charlton; ‘but yet I so much dislike absence from those I love, that I cannot resolve upon the practice of that kind of art. No. I must honestly show the regard I feel; and if I obtain a return, it must be by asking for it in a downright way. I cannot beat about the bush; and to gain all, I must risk all. Well, good-bye. I have promised to walk out with my brother. We are going to look at the marbles at the British Museum. Miss Ramsay, have you seen them?’

‘Yes; I know them well.’

‘But would you not like to see them in my brother’s company; he knows so much of the history of sculpture? I am going with him partly to improve my mind. We Indians have little opportunity for studying art.’

‘I should like much,’ replied Margaret, ‘to see these things in Mr. Charlton’s company; but I have promised Emilia to stay with Willy this morning.’

‘How kind of you! I hope at least that the boy loves you as he should.’

To which observation the child at once replied by stretching over from Hanworth’s knee, to give Margaret a hearty hug—an incident that Major Charlton had not intended to bring about; and Hanworth’s smile as he drew Willy back from an embrace that seemed too rude, was so tender that he could not feel at ease till he persuaded him to come away, and so he suggested,

‘Why, Hanworth, it will be the very thing for you. You have not promised to play head-nurse, and your company will not be less profitable than my brother’s.’

‘I will gladly come,’ said Hanworth; and Margaret was left in the confirmed conviction that a more tiresome man than Major Charlton had never existed.

‘It is a happy thing for you,’ said she, when she returned home, to Edith, ‘that you will escape the daily visit from Major Charlton. He is occupied at the British Museum, trying to learn something about art.’

‘I should think myself very lucky,’ replied Edith, ‘if I never had a more unwelcome visitor than Major Charlton.’

This sentiment gained force when its expression was followed by the entrance of Lady Howell; for her manner, as she seated herself, appeared to in-

dicate that she had some subject not altogether pleasant on her mind, and after a few careless inquiries concerning the Charltons' child, she said,

'Margaret, I think it is now time for a little explanation between us. During these last weeks your silence concerning Lord Hanworth could in a manner be accounted for. It might be supposed that during the first period of mourning for the death of poor dear mamma you might shrink from entering upon the subject of marriage, but that sort of delicacy must not be carried too far. You have been, of course, the subject of many comments in many quarters; and, in short, the day has clearly arrived for declaring your engagement.'

During this address, Lady Howell kept her eyes fixed on her sister's face, and inquisitively watched the changes of colour rapidly succeeding each other, as indications of a strong feeling; the lips, too, parted and trembled, but Margaret remained silent.

'Well,' continued Lady Howell, after a short pause, during which she seemed to wait for an answer; 'this is quite unaccountable. What is it that keeps you silent? Why not tell it at once? Is this enforced mystery to make a romance for you where none is needed? Recollect how much I am already informed. Only just before your departure from Elderslie, poor dear mamma confided to me that before long I should certainly hear of your reply to Lord Hanworth's declaration. Why, now, what is

the matter?—what are you so white about? And Mrs. Stirling looks as pale as you. What awful secret can there be? You had better tell it to me, my dears, whatever it is; for only on that condition will I protect you from Lady Allerton's investigations. She has been positively besieging me with them for the last week, and I shall be forced at last to surrender on any terms.'

A growing indignation supplied Margaret now with strength, and she said,

'Lady Allerton has no right to make any such inquiries; and to her I would never give an answer on such a subject. But you have a different claim; and it is due to our sisterly relation that I should tell you that there is no sort of engagement between Lord Hanworth and myself, and indeed nothing more than an intimate and tranquil friendship.'

'An intimate and tranquil friendship! Margaret, you are insincere. But indeed there is no end to the insincerity of young ladies on these points. Why, but yesterday there was poor Adeline, the little goose, trying to humbug her mother about the "intimate and tranquil friendship" of Captain French, when his servant was seen at the door bringing a bouquet for the evening ball. Oh, my dear child! what is your opinion of my wits? Why, poor dear credulous mamma herself could not have been so hoodwinked! Come, come, this will not do. Proceed, my dear, to tell me the truth.'

Margaret became greatly excited, and in forcible and peculiarly distinct accents she said,

‘Sophia, I swear to you solemnly—for you seem to require an oath—that there is no kind of engagement between me and Lord Hanworth.’

‘Then,’ cried Lady Howell, angrily, ‘you are a little fool—a coquettish little fool; and you have rejected him!’

Edith now came to her friend’s rescue.

‘This, Lady Howell, is surely not needful. It must be enough for you and for all of us to know that both Margaret and Lord Hanworth are disengaged.’

But Margaret’s sincerity would not suffer her to leave her sister under such a delusion, and she said in a resolute tone,

‘No, Sophia, nothing of this nature has ever passed between us; and Lord Hanworth is only a kind friend.’

‘A very kind friend indeed!’ cried Lady Howell. ‘It is singular, to say the least. A bachelor of thirty-six so kind a friend to a beautiful woman of twenty-two that he follows her to Italy at a time when many of his political friends, Sir Simon included, particularly wished for his presence in England, turns up at the same hotel, and returns home nearly at the same time, placing her for the journey under the protection of his most intimate friend, Mrs. Wilson, with injunctions as to her com-

fort of a quite anxious kind (you need not wonder I know it—Mrs. Wilson naturally told me herself); and then he worries a Cabinet Minister nearly out of his life to obtain a comfortable post for the favourite friend's husband, in order to keep the favourite friend in England. Quite a new form this for a quiet friendship to take. But I have done. Only let me warn you, Margaret, as a well-married eldest sister, not to be deluding yourself with romantic notions of a military hero. Major Charlton has, no doubt, done very well in India; but in domestic life it is no great advantage to a wife that her husband should be able to fight a battle. However, I tell you plainly that I would rather hear your approaching marriage with the Major declared to-morrow, than see things dawdling on as they are now. When I remember the number of people you have refused, Heaven knows why, I grow impatient, and so does Sir Simon. It was only two days ago that a certain young Baronet confided to me that he was ready to return to the charge if I could only hold out to him the slightest hope. Now, you queer creature, what are you crying about? What do you think Lady Allerton says? She begins to suspect that Mrs. Charlton gladly keeps Lord Hanworth fluttering about herself! Those pattern good wives so very fond of their husbands, are sometimes very fond too of the company of their husbands' friends—that is Lady Allerton's little insinuation.'

‘Lady Allerton’s insinuation,’ exclaimed Margaret, ‘is like herself—contemptible and odious. I am ashamed ever to find myself in that woman’s company; and I am grieved, Sophia, that you should so often be so by choice. Who shall touch pitch and not be defiled? It is really dreadful to me to hear her words from your mouth. You know as well as I do—as well as Lady Allerton does herself—that this is entirely untrue.’

‘Possibly Lady Allerton’s nature,’ said Edith, ‘does not qualify her even to imagine that of a good woman.’

‘There, there,’ said Lady Howell, impatiently, ‘let us dismiss this topic. I know Mrs. Charlton is a dear good woman, and all that; but you are two romancists, and do not understand the ways of society. This sort of comment must now and then be made upon its members to keep up its vitality. A bad wife is no great fun (there are so many of them), but a little side-cut at the reputation of a good one is just now and then, done judiciously, really amusing. Poor worthy Mrs. Charlton! fancy her surprise and dismay if she chanced to hear of it again! Poor soul! she would take her usual step, and go and consult dear William about it immediately.’

‘And how,’ said Edith, ‘would Lady Allerton like that? I should strongly advise her not to try it.’

‘Oh, my dear,’ replied Lady Howell, ‘do not talk

in that tone ; it would not do at all. I know quite well that Charlton is a man to be afraid of. Indeed, Lady Allerton herself is cowed by him. You must not repeat a word of this. Now mind, Edith, Margaret!—you must never repeat it. It was strictly confidential, my dears ; you know, my whole talk has been confidential.'

'Let it be forgotten,' said Margaret, 'and never renewed.'

A visit from Mr. Valentine Vernon now made a welcome interruption to Lady Howell's. He was conscious of a particular warmth in his reception, and his peevish temper leading him in a manner to grudge it to himself, he said, with a little petulant shrug of the shoulders,

'I have not seen you so glad of my appearance, Mrs. Stirling, since your marriage ; and there are Miss Ramsay and Lady Howell, too, looking actually as if they did not hate me. How have I deserved this favour ? Ah ! I know how it must be ; three ladies together for too long—a quarrel—women are always quarrelling, the novelists tell me (I know nothing about them myself), and I have just come in time to prevent bloodshed. Lady Howell was about to draw her stiletto.'

'No,' said Lady Howell, 'those who use stilettos are wont to stab in the back. I abstain from that kind of thing ; and if I make an attack, it is face to face.'

‘And that is the worst way,’ replied Vernon; ‘by far the cruellest. If I am to be murdered, let me at least be spared the pain of seeing my own deathblow.’

‘I give you the opportunity of defending yourself,’ said Lady Howell.

‘But do you give me the power? Ah! Lady Howell, I could not show fight with you for my combatant. A look from those eyes would extinguish the light in mine.’

In reply to this Lady Howell said,

‘You are the strangest man—the queerest compound of satire and flattery that I ever saw.’

But she was so greedy of compliment, that even this of Vernon’s gave her pleasure, and she went away smilingly.

‘The flattery and the satire go well together,’ said Edith, as Vernon seated himself by her. ‘It is your mean opinion of women that leads you to cajole them.’

‘Yes,’ said Vernon, ‘and the only person I have a perfectly good opinion of is precisely the only one I never flatter—myself. Well, I may be, however, just for this moment, invested with a little interest in your eyes, a little borrowed interest; I have just parted from your husband. He has joined Charlton and his brother and Hanworth in a visit to the British Museum, and he has commissioned me to tell you that Major Charlton is coming home with him to dinner.’

Margaret had a difficulty in concealing her vexation at this announcement; but Edith, when a moment's reflection had told her that there was a well-provided dinner, received it cheerfully.

Vernon then passed on to a description of some evening parties at which he had lately been present, and one at Lady Allerton's.

Lady Allerton had been very much out of humour; for Sir George had given an unauthorized invitation to Captain French, and there was the old story going on between him and Adeline, while Lord Hanworth was sitting in a remote corner of the room doing nothing, apparently dreaming with his eyes open. The party had been a failure.

'I am very glad of it,' cried Margaret, with sudden warmth.

'Very glad of a neighbour's failure, Miss Ramsay? Why is this?'

'Lady Allerton I cannot bring myself to regard as a neighbour,' said Margaret; 'and I must be always wishing her to fail when, if she succeeded in her schemes, she would be the cause of misery.'

'Margaret is just now roused,' explained Edith, 'by an attack of Lady Allerton upon Mrs. Charlton.'

'For that,' rejoined Vernon, 'I will be roused too, drag my old rusty court sword from its sheath, and do honourable battle. I shall rally an army, and quote Burke, "shall not a thousand swords leap

from their scabbards," &c., and even the imperturbable Hanworth shall be forced into action.'

Vernon lingered so long that Stirling found him on his return, and then he also was invited to dinner, greatly to Margaret's satisfaction, but not to that of the Major: indeed it soon became clear that with him something was wrong, and the word cross only could exactly express the state of his temper: his legs were weary with standing about among the marbles, and he really thought that staring at those things was harder work than marching under a hot sun. To this followed some comments on the Indian climate, and Vernon then put some questions on the internal government of India, which Major Charlton seemed either unwilling or unable to answer, and the conversation was wound up by the observation, aside, from Vernon to Margaret, that Anglo-Indians sometimes knew something about each other, but never by any chance anything about India.

CHAPTER XXII.

CHARLTON and his wife could not fail to perceive the present condition of the Major's mind, and could not fail to be anxious about it, both for his sake and their own. His naturally cheerful temper became uncertain ; he would be in high spirits for one hour and full of complaints for another, and even his fondness for the little convalescent boy was disturbed by jealous fits. He indeed once suggested to his brother that his friendship with Hanworth was excessive and unaccountable, but upon that occasion he received such an answer that he dropped the name for ever. Charlton following him with his eyes one evening as he listlessly lounged out of the room, muttering something about a visit to the Stirlings, turned from his game of chess with Hanworth to address his wife, and said,

‘ I really do not know what to do with Edmund. I wish some one would ask him into the country ; he is wasting his time and wearing his heart out.’

‘ I think so, too,’ replied Mrs. Charlton, with a sigh.

‘ What is he wearing his heart out about ?’ asked Hanworth ; ‘ does promotion not come quick enough ?’

‘ My dear Hanworth, have you really failed to see the object of all my brother’s present anxiety ? It is one that I should not have alluded to had I thought you uninformed. You are surely not so ; you have surely perceived——’

‘ Oh, yes, you must have perceived !’ cried Emilia.

‘ I believe I have,’ answered Hanworth ; and looking attentively upon the chessboard, he said, ‘ My knight checks.’

Charlton then resumed the game, and was mated.

That very night Major Charlton’s trouble found its vent in a confidence to his sister-in-law, and he entreated her to say what she thought of Margaret’s feelings towards him. It grieved the kind Emilia to have to give an answer that must be the cause of pain, but candour compelled her to do so, and she did it firmly and strongly. She had, however, an ardent and a sanguine disposition to deal with, and Edmund persisted that there could be no certainty unless Margaret had actually spoken to her on the subject, and finally insisted that she must seek her out the next morning and talk to her, a course which Mrs. Charlton very unwillingly adopted, and which brought on at once, as she anticipated, the end of all her brother’s hopes. It was, however, perhaps better for him that the matter should be decided, and when soon afterwards he left Charlton’s house on a visit to a brother officer, all parties felt

that that was the best possible arrangement for him.

Happiness indeed now seemed to be returning to them all. Willy's eyes were recovering their brightness, and his laugh was regaining its merry tone; and into the cheeks of his beloved Margaret—Aunt Margaret, as he was wont to call her—something of their former brilliancy of colour was coming back; but the doctor insisted on a visit to the sea for the perfecting of the child's recovery, and the petted boy would not hear of going without his favourite companion.

'I will not go without Margaret,' said he. 'No, nor without Lord Hanworth' (climbing on Hanworth's knee as he spoke). 'And I will tell you what, I wish they were married like papa and mamma, that I might always have them both together.'

It would be difficult to say at this moment which of those two faces glowed most deeply; but Margaret bent hers quite down, yet not before Hanworth had obtained one glance at it. Mrs. Charlton walked into the other room, Charlton chidingly carried the child away, and Hanworth and Margaret were left alone together.

Finally it came to pass that Sir Simon and Lady Howell were duly informed of Margaret's engagement to Lord Hanworth, and that no amount of protestation could ever persuade either of them that

she had not been secretly engaged for many months; while all Lady Allerton's discernment was baffled, and she was still left on the subject of this union a prey to uncertain and varying conjectures, only certain on one point, that Adeline had at no time been the object of regard, and at last fatigued into complying with Sir George's observation, that it was clearly of no use to oppose poor Captain French any longer.

'Poor Captain French, indeed !' said Lady Allerton ; 'but I believe they would marry without leave if we did not give it ; and if the obstinate girl were to elope, it would expose me to the sneers of all my acquaintance, so let them marry and experience all the enjoyments of poverty.'

'Enjoyments which I am ready to describe to them, and exhibit to them, whenever they will visit me in my lodgings,' said Vernon.

'They had better have their wedding-breakfast there,' said Lady Allerton, 'by way of a beginning.'

Charlton was secretly amused at the pliability of his wife's disposition, while she explained to him that this marriage had for Hanworth some advantages beyond those offered by the first he had proposed for himself. Margaret, she argued, had such an uncommon share of beauty as must make her an object of admiration in society, and she had a fortune fit to support a title, while the qualities of her understanding were not inferior to Edith's, and must

insure an untiring charm to her daily companionship. Her heart, too, had been tried, and found perfect, both in friendship and in love.

How Hanworth explained to Margaret his first preference for Edith, or whether he attempted to explain it at all, must remain a mystery. But however this may have been, it is certain that the union was as happy as the warmest friends of both parties could wish, and that Edith Stirling continued to be the tender and trusted friend; this friendship having added to its early fervour a feeling of unalterable security from the perils it had surmounted.

Sir Simon, however mortified at Margaret's reserve in the matter, found a pleasure in reading out of the *Times*, to a select party at breakfast, in such deliberate tones as made the paragraph last as long as a leading article, the marriage of Margaret Ramsay, daughter of the late Mrs. Ramsay of Chesterfield-street, and sister of Lady Howell of Elderslie, to Viscount Hanworth, of Beauchamp Tower.

And Mrs. Lacy distilled a melancholy pleasure out of the occasion by the reflection that it was very deplorable that Mrs. Ramsay should not have lived to see the event, being so suddenly cut off; to which reflection Miss Surtanage, to whom it was addressed, primly drawing up her thin austere figure, replied that, 'considering Mrs. Ramsay's vain courses, she could

not but see the finger of Providence in this dispensation.' At the wedding breakfast, which took place at Elderslie, Vernon was one of the guests, and he declared to Edith Stirling that now he felt he had lost his own safety. He must surely be the next victim. He had thought Hanworth a determined bachelor, fixed and insensible.

'Yes,' said Lady Allerton, overhearing him, 'yes, Mr. Vernon, you are a doomed man.'

'But I shall not acknowledge myself so till you are a widow.'

When Edith, at the hour of departure, gave Margaret the parting kiss, and felt the friendly pressure of Lord Hanworth's hand, she turned to Stirling, and whispered in his ear, 'I think I am not less happy in this marriage than in my own.'

THE END.

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